

S E R M O N S

IN TWO VOLUMES.

B Y



F. W E B B.

THE SECOND EDITION.

VOLUME I.

Τὸ καλὸν Χριστιανισμὸν τελειοτάτη, τὸ ὁρὸς ἡκρι-
σσωμενος, αὕτη ἡ κορυφή ἡ ἀνωτάτα, τό τὰ κοινῇ
συμφερόντα ζητεῖν. Chrysost. Orat. 25.

L O N D O N :

Printed by DRYDEN LEACH,
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P R E F A C E.

THE Author cannot omit this opportunity of returning his thanks to those of his friends, whose ready and generous subscriptions enabled him to comply with the request of some others in this publication. As he was solicited to it upon the delivery of the following discourses in public, he has paid a scrupulous attention in giving his friends to read, what they so candidly heard; with no other alterations, than what might have been supposed necessary upon the review of hasty productions, composed without the most distant apprehension of their ever seeing the light. The two first discourses in the second volume indeed are an exception to this; the one was entirely composed, the other materially altered, for publication: the Author therefore submits these to the censure of the public, and the rest, to the candour of his friends.

It is presumed, that any apology is unnecessary for the quotations made from other authors, even those from our great dramatic poet, since the Author can plead a precedent in the apostle Paul himself. Whatever can be made subservient to the important interests of virtue and religion, and the happiness of mankind, cannot be unimportant : for as Chrysostom observes, in the quotation prefixed to these volumes, —*This is the canon of compleat Christianity, this its exact boundary, and its summit of perfection, to seek those things, that conduce to the public good.*

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S U B J E C T S

OF THE

F I R S T V O L U M E.

S E R M O N I.

Of Man, and the Providence of God.

PSALM viii. 4.

*What is man, that thou art mindful of him;
and the son of man, that thou visitest
him?*

Page 3

S E R M O N II.

The State of Man in this World considered.

JOB v. 6, 7.

*Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust,
neither doth trouble spring out of the ground:
Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks
fly upward*

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The Christian Course.

I COR. ix. 24.

—So run, that ye may obtain. Page 59

S E R M O N IV.

No security against greater, if we have yielded to less temptations.

JEREM. xii. 5.

If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan? Page 85

S E R M O N V.

Of disinterested and universal charity.

ECCLES. xi. 1, 2.

Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days: give a portion

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to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.

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SERMON VI.

Of Conscience.

2 COR. i. 12.

For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience.

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SERMON VII.

The story of Naaman the leper.

2 KINGS v. 13.

And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said—My father! if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it?—how much rather then when he saith to thee, wash and be clean?

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S E R M O N V I I I .

The keeper of the prison converted by
Paul and Silas.

A C T S xvi. 33.

*And he took them the same hour of the night,
and washed their stripes; and was bap-
tized, he and all his straightway. P. 181*

S E R M O N I X .

Acquaintance with God.

J O B xxii. 21.

*Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at
peace.*

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SUBJECTS, &c.

SERMON VIII.

The knowledge of the human condition
and of the

S E R M O N I.

Of Man, and the Providence of God.

VOL. I.

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S E R M O N I.

Of Man, and the Providence of God.

PSALM viii. 4.

*What is man, that thou art mindful of him ;
and the son of man, that thou visitest him ?*

THE generations of men hastily pass away—The affairs of human life are in constant fluctuation and change—Not a day that bears the same aspect as the foregoing, but each is marked with peculiar characters of its own—year after year rolls its period—ages pass away unnoticed—the same objects affect the human mind, the same passions operate, the same disappointments ensue, the same calamities attend us, which awaited our forefathers.—Not all their caution prevents our trials ;

not all their experience makes us wise. We are each of us resolved to try, if we cannot be more successful than those who have gone before us. We are determined to run the same hazards in quest of happiness, as our predecessors have done: we take no warning from their complaints, and we rashly venture upon the same schemes, either of ambition, profit, or pleasure, with hopes of much better success. We engage in the world, resolved to try what happiness it will afford.—We hastily launch forth our little bark upon the ocean of life, tempting the storm, or defying the winds; fearless of those insidious rocks upon which thousands have been shipwrecked; and, driven at random in quest of happiness, we spread our sails, hoping to catch every prosperous gale that might waft us to our desired haven.—Thus are the hopes of man ever upon the wing. We readily submit to toils, and boldly encounter dangers, without much premeditation either upon our own strength, the

dangerous passage of human life, or the harbour of eternal rest.

These solicitudes and attempts have for their objects the emoluments of this present world, such as riches, honor, fame, &c. things which in themselves are foreign to man's best interests: they neither depend upon his merit, or are ever the just reward of it. They are subject to accidents of chance and time, and consequently cannot be the chief good of man.

It is necessary, therefore, to stop short in this career of human folly; to consider wisely how we shall steer our course aright; to drop anchor ere we proceed too far, and fix upon the pole-star of truth before we venture again on our way.—Agreeable to which purpose, we will consider man at large, and enquire what is his nature, being, make and end; what are the dispensations of God respecting man; what

are his duties and expectations here ; and his exaltation hereafter. And,

I. Man is a percipient being, i. e. he is formed with senses, that take cognizance of every thing around him ; that give him information of his own existence, and the existence of the material world. He perceives others formed with like powers, and in the same image with himself, capable of discovering and admiring those objects which his senses enable him to investigate and approve. Formed different from the beasts of the field, man walks erect, has an open, expressive countenance : his eye takes in the extensive prospect of nature ; he views with pleasure the verdant field, the falling valley, the rising hill, the pointed promontory, the spacious ocean, and the barren desert. He can traverse all these in quest either of profit or pleasure. The stores of nature are all thrown open to his senses ; his correspondent appetites are the gracious per-

S E R M O N I.

7

mission of the Creator to use them all. They are the still, though sacred voice of Divine Goodness.—Arise, O man ! enjoy thine existence.—The table of bounty is spread, and fully supplied, partake of the repast.—Let the perfume of spring delight thy smell—the delicious streams of nature, conveyed through a variety of channels, quench thy thirst, and delight thy taste—let the song of joy, throughout creation, take with rapture thine ear—and the rich tribute of autumn, be this thy golden crown of rejoicing—use all this large provision of divine bounty, for the earth is given to thee, and the fullness thereof.—

Man is not only enabled to survey the spacious theatre on which he is placed, but he can exalt his views, and raise his wondering eyes to the infinitely expanded heavens.—He there, with unspeakable delight, plunges his astonished sight into the immensity of nature : views not only the

sun refulgent in its glory, but all the starry hosts marshalled in orderly array by the Omnipotent ; *whose glory the heavens declare, and whose handy work the firmament sheweth.*—But,

II. Man is not only a percipient, but an intelligent being.—He not only perceives the stately fabric of the world ; his eye not only views creation with rapture ; his ear is not only delighted with the harmony of nature, and his smell and taste regaled with her choicest fruits ; but he reasons upon these endowments : they are to him the first principles of knowledge.—They discover to him a scene magnificent and great ; and lead him to form some conclusion from those self-evident truths. He reasons, that all these things, with himself, had a beginning—that some power, and wisdom, and goodness were employed to produce and uphold all things.—That every thing is created for some appointed end—that this end must be wor-

thy such a mighty apparatus, and answerable to such great designs—when he not only reflects, but finds, by experience, that all these things serve to promote his happiness—that he is made chief in this world of created beings—that his superior power commands the submission, and entitles him to the use of all inferior animals—when he considers, that he began to exist independent of his own consciousness, and continues to be, independent of his own volition, or any immediate power of his own exerted to that end—when he compares his imperfections with his high station; his meanness with the greatness of design in his creation, his mind is not only sublimely struck with the excellence of that being who formed him what he is, but—pensive it drops into submissive humility; it cannot comprehend that goodness which he sees discovered, because it is boundless: and gratitude for a while stands suspended, while his wonder, with the royal psalmist, thus breaks forth.—*When*

I consider these thy heavens, this earth, the work of thy fingers, the moon, and the stars, which thou hast ordained ; Lord ! what is man that thou art mindful of him ; and the son of man, that thou visitest him ? That thou shouldst make him but a little lower than the angels, and crown him with glory and honour ; that thou shouldst make him to have dominion over the works of thine hand ; that thou shouldst put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beast of the field, the fowl of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea ?—When sacred wonder has thus uttered its speech, the song of joy and praise assumes.—O ! Lord, our Lord ! how excellent is thy name in all the earth ?—

III. Man is not only a percipient and intelligent, but also a moral and immortal being. He is formed with those powers of mind which enable him to judge of, approve, or condemn either his own, or the actions of mankind; and the genuine

uncorrupt prepossessions of his soul invariably lead to the approbation of moral qualities; and are no less strong on the side of virtue, than the animal senses, tending to those objects from which they receive their highest gratification. And from this part of the human constitution, arise all the principles and motives of virtue and religion.—That man is an immortal being, not only these moral faculties of his nature, and their direct tendencies, demonstrate; but that inextinguishable hope of immortality, so strongly implanted in the human breast, evidently evinces.—The powers of his mind forbid man to rest content in the thought of total dissolution.—The fear of falling into nothing is greater than the fear of punishment, notwithstanding we are conscious of offence.—The existence of the capacities of the human mind, is a strong presumption in favour of this doctrine; and, by the proper exercise of these, we are led to conclude on the side of its reality.—Man is formed with

senses which unite him to this scene of being.—These he has in common with the brutes that perish.—They meet, it is true, with suitable objects of gratification, and ample provision in this way is made by the beneficent Creator for man. But he has other powers, which are not common with the animal creation; he can reflect upon the past, and anticipate the future periods of existence. His soul, winged by hope, lives beyond the present time—it is not an instant of being to which man is confined—nor does hope alone anticipate the hour of happiness, but fear the hour of distress. Man finds himself affected by ten thousand circumstances and events, by which the brute creation can never suffer.—He has sources of happiness which are never laid open to them.—He reasons from their beginning, and finds it answerable to the short period of their existence on earth—but, with respect to himself, he sees such power and wisdom displayed, which point out an higher designation than

his present allotment. — He sees nature rising from small beginnings to himself, as to the summit of perfection here below. In himself he finds united all the excellencies of nature—he views himself as the master-piece of the whole—he knows none superior—he finds himself possessor of a large dominion. — Beneath him, he sees an entire connection preserved. Inanimate nature rising by just degrees to animate : beings in their several classes increasing in perfection till they approach very near to himself. Reasoning thus of his mental powers, man finds that they bespeak his alliance to beings superior to any he here beholds. He feels indeed the moral propensities of his nature leading him to the approbation and practice of virtues, which result from his connection with his fellow creatures — all the tender feelings of his breast have suitable objects on which they expand themselves, and in which they terminate. — But this is not all — man's happiness is not insured : he is miserable in

the thought of alloy to which it is subject; he is not secure a moment in his pleasures. — His health might be impaired; himself separated from his dearest friend by the stroke of death. — Then what become of his exalted views, his extended hopes, his enlarged expectations, his vehement desires? — What! mean they nothing? — Do all these great characters of man, engraven by the finger of God, spell nothing? are they written in vain? — Are they only delusively designed to make man suffer the present mode of existence, by hopes that shall never be satisfied, and desires that have no correspondent realities? — This can never be the true state of man. His exalted being was not surely designed as an elevation in woe? — He was not raised to the head of this creation, to be thrown down into the vale of misery? — The goodness of God could not rise in just degrees in the scale of being, and stop at him? — The capacities of his soul point out some scheme of providence; and they

chiefly refer to another state of being; they cannot here be fully employed : they are restrained by the corporeal part, for they are subject to its laws. This very restraint implies a relief; for nothing was ever formed by God to attain a certain end, with insuperable bars of difficulty in the way of its perfection.—The capacities then of the human mind, referring to some future state, plainly discover the intention of God in the formation of human nature.

Man reasons upon the perfections of God which he sees displayed. He confers these reasonings with his own experience; he feels, by his moral powers, that God formed him for a virtuous being; he justly attributes moral excellence to his Creator.—He sees that the design of all, is happiness—that virtue, with respect to himself, alone promotes this—that this, therefore, the Deity must approve—and if he does sustain the character of a governor,

it must be that of a moral administrator—that he will vindicate his laws and authority—that if no instances appear, wherein his approbation is manifestly discovered, the plan is defective—he therefore concludes, that as this is a state of trial in virtue, that the decisions ought not properly to be passed, till the grand drama be ended—and the whole scheme unravel itself; and that the future world is the proper place in which rewards and punishments shall commence. These are the prospects which delight and satisfy the mind of man, and vindicate the ways of God.—I desire to be understood as speaking here upon the Christian system, as receiving from thence the best assistance in this important point: to which I should have spoken more particularly, did it not anticipate another part of the discourse, which due order obliges us to defer.—

Thus the wise and benevolent intentions of God evidently appear in the constitution

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of man. Thus it is, that the eternal Deity is mindful of man's happiness—but he rests not here—God has not only formed man for happiness, but he conducts him to it. He has not laid a foundation so noble and large, and left the superstructure to man's own wisdom—no! *he visiteth the sons of men.* And that,

I. By the dispensations of his providence—who shall pretend to say, that it is inconsistent with the matchless greatness of the divine character, to superintend those beings whom he originally formed; and with the benignant eye of a tender parent to watch over all, promoting the universal happiness, while the good of each individual is not forgotten?—Away with that disconsolate doctrine, that would exclude a particular providence from human affairs; that leaves us, as to our particular case, in darkness and distress; banishing consolation from the human mind; leaving it disturbed in the hour of calamity; com-

fortless in the day of misfortune.—It is but a very imperfect account that can be given of the moral administration of divine providence, if you exclude a particular interposition: or, with some mistaken philosophers, suppose it acts only in reference to collective bodies, such as nations and states: for are not these made up of individuals, who may be considered as so many springs essential to the operations and movements of the whole? Strictly speaking, the idea of a general, includes that of a particular providence. For God must, agreeable to the general order and established rules of his government, make use of individuals to bring about the happiness of the whole.—If it be said, that nations alone are the objects of his providential care, why may we not extend the idea to the whole world?—Why not to an intire system?—Why not to connected systems?—Why not to the whole universe?—Is it beneath Omnipotence to support each creature by an unremitted exertion of

power?—Does it detract from his unerring wisdom to order all events?—Is the divine goodness impaired, by granting infinite supplies to all, according to their several wants?—Are not each of these perfections, by this particular attention, more conspicuously displayed?—It is not a doctrine more comfortable to the human mind, than it is consonant to reason, that *the Lord is good to all, and that his tender mercies are over all his works.*—To enforce this truth so desirable to mankind from their very state of being, our great master illustrates it by a very striking instance, when he declares, that *not a sparrow falls to the ground without the permission of our heavenly father; and that the very hairs of our heads are numbered;* implying the minutest concern for the very beasts of the field, and fowls of the air; and such a particular attention to the happiness of man, and human affairs, that the meanest appendage of our nature, that might even

fall from us unperceived, escapes not the knowledge and observation of God.—

II. The Deity has more especially visited man, in the revelation of his word.—

This, by way of eminence, is called the visitation of God.—It is not improbable, considering David as an illustrious prophet, whose writings, by our Lord's own declaration, contain prophecies of himself, that this latter part of the text might refer to the state of the Messiah's kingdom—be this as it may, certain it is, that God by this means hath, in a most especial manner, visited the sons of men.—By this he has made known the counsels of his will—taught men their duty in the most express manner—declared himself the moral governor of the world; who will dispense his favours according to the rules of righteousness, judgment, and truth—giving mankind all the assistances that are necessary to obtain his approbation—adapting

the instructions of his word to the capacities of all — suiting the rewards to their hopes ; and awing them by his denunciations—sending his own Son with terms of reconciliation ; and at the time when mankind were sunk into the greatest degeneracy, and most needed the visitation of God, he regarded them in their low estate, and commissioned the Saviour to make known to mankind the power by which they were at first created, in wonderful attestations of his will to redeem them—exerting the influences of his providence to restore mankind to immortality, suitable to his original design of bringing them into existence to make them happy.—Not sending the angel of destruction to avenge himself, and assert the authority of his injured laws, as the sovereign God of all—not appearing to mankind, arrayed in awful terrors, to judge them by the strict rules of inflexible justice ; but from the throne of righteousness, and the seat of mercy, graciously extending the sceptre of par-

don—sending his Son into this world, not to condemn, but *save* it—not to execute the rigour of judgment, but pronounce the forgiveness of sin—not as the messenger of severe reprehension from the Almighty, but as the Son of his love; drawing mankind to allegiance by the cords of affection, and the mildest influences of obedience, by representing the eternal God, not as one *strict to mark iniquity*, and an inexorable king, but as the *Lord God, slow to anger, and plenteous in redemption*; the friend, the father of the human race—awakening the gratitude of mankind, by promises of rewarding their imperfect obedience, not according to their exact desert, but by the measure alone of infinite mercy and grace—exciting their love by the most tender compassion—giving them the most perfect example in all virtue and holiness, in the spotless character of the Saviour of the world.—By this means, the Deity does not make a transient visit, but leaves the most beneficent

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traces and indelible marks of his gracious condescension to man—giving him the assurance of divine veracity, that from this time, men should look upon the divine communion established as a sure token, that *God would, in very deed, dwell with man.*—That the influences of his grace should enliven and invigorate their souls, as much as the spirit, by which they were upheld, did their bodies.—Promising them an eternal inheritance; where the sacred union here begun between heaven and earth, God, and his obedient creatures, should be complete in the inseparable love and obedience that shall there obtain.—

Such is the nature of man—such his being, make, and end, as here described—such are the dispensations and visitation of God respecting him. From whence we may infer the design of God in the creation of man; and the duties, which from hence result, due from man to his Creator.—

Man was formed for happiness.—The perfections of God, the dispensations of his providence, the nature of man, all concur to prove this observation true. The provisions made both for his animal and immortal part evince this. The power of God first brought him into being; the wisdom of God formed him with those exalted capacities by which his nature is distinguished and ennobled: the goodness of God supplies all his wants; the mercy of God hath planned the scheme of his salvation; and the veracity of God stands on the side of the confirmation of all his gracious promises.—What gratitude then is due from man to the great Creator?—What reverence of his authority—what regard to his laws—what love of the divine character—what fear of his righteous displeasure—what rejoicing in his goodness, what obedience to his commands, ought to fill the soul, and actuate the lives of his intelligent offspring?—What care ought we to take to fill up every station of

life, and discharge all those duties we owe to God, mankind, and ourselves, with the pure desire of gaining his approbation?—

From hence we learn the true estimate of human life, viz. that it is valuable no further than it is virtuously improved—that an undue dedication of ourselves, either to the lawful business, or unlawful pleasures of this world, is an abuse of our nature, and the design of heaven.—Human life was intended for much more valuable purposes than to be wasted in vanity and folly.—Whatever does not conduce to our virtue, and best happiness, is time mis-spent, and talents misemployed.—Let us not squander away the precious moments of our existence, in complaining that we have but a short time, in which we are to transact the most important business.—Let this teach us the proper improvement of every moment.—We ourselves make time short, at least that portion of it which ought to be employed in

religion and virtue, by suffering so many things of a foreign nature to engross so great a part of it.—We are lavish of days and months, and then complain, how soon a year glides unperceived away.—Human life is sufficiently long to answer all the valuable purposes to which it ought to be applied—it cannot be too short to the man who has rightly improved it.—None but the foolish and vain think it flies too fast.—Impress but every moment with some character of virtue, and you will find the amount to be a fair title to immortal happiness.

- I address myself to the young—yours
- is the time of pleasure—but remember
- it is on its rapid wing.—The flowery
- path of joy invites your hasty feet incautious where they tread—the roses
- of delight court your finished senses, and
- their gay appearance prevents your discerning the dangerous thorns that beset
- them; nor dream you of the invenomed

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sting of the serpent remorse, that lurks .
 beneath their luxuriant growth.—We will .
 not too rigorously impose on you the severe .
 precepts of austere age; we will say—en- .
 joy your time— but take care that it be ,
 within the boundaries of duty.—Go not .
 to the utmost limits; the line is scarce dis- .
 tinguishable that separates good from evil. .
 Do not in this respect trust to your nice .
 discernment, and strength—wiser, and .
 mightier than you, have been deceived, and .
 overcome—use sparingly the favours of
 heaven—they are so well adapted to your
 passions and appetites, there is great dan-
 ger, that the abuse of heaven's own good-
 ness, will lead to a violation of its laws.—
 If you can trust experience; if you dare .
 be wise, ere folly and disappointment teach .
 you, that all this world can afford is no- .
 thing, make an early offering to religion .
 and virtue: bind all your unruly desires, .
 and bring them to the altar of purity, and
 sacrifice to your happiness.—Nor think .
 your age alone exposes you to danger:

- they, who have trod the path of life
- longer than you, need caution and advice.
- The world is generally their idol—mercandize and gain ingross their attention,
- —Here is peculiar danger—men here
- have plausible reasons for their vices: they
- cover over avarice with the shew of frugality, and parsimonious illiberality they call
- by the name of œconomy.—But is the
- prime of life fit for no better service than
- to toil for riches, ambition, and honor?—
- Let not the first and most important business of human life be put off to its last
- stage—begin now to be wise.—

• One should imagine, that those in the
 • more advanced state of age, who have experienced what this world can afford, and
 • are now past its enjoyments, should need
 • more of comfort than exhortation: one
 • should naturally suppose those the more
 • eligible arguments, which tend to reconcile them to this state of being, in order
 • to induce them to bear their continuance

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here without murmur or complaint.—But, in fact, this is not generally the case.—Mankind are not the better fitted to die, the nearer they approach to their latter end.—The love of life does not proportionably decline with our declining fun.—The feeble eye, upon which the beauties of nature shine in vain, which the light of day miserably afflicts, shall be lifted to heaven, in humble supplication to implore a lengthened period.—The trembling hand, that scarcely can supply the tasteless mouth with food, shall be impotently raised to beg the mighty boon, that it shall tremble still longer.—The loosened knees shall bend, in ardent request, that they might still bear the tottering frame, worn out with decay.—O! age, where is thy wisdom?—What can delight thee more?—The flowers are faded—the day of festivity is passed—the evening shades draw on.—Do not all thy senses, or rather their poor remains, inform thee, that the world can grant no more?—Prepare then de-

- cently to quit the world, that has already
- quitted thee — resign thy title to enjoy-
- ment here—and if thou hast not secured
- a better inheritance, it is now too late—
- the first-fruits should have been heaven's.
- —What can the falling vine yield?—
- Trust to thy Creator, shew the duty of re-
- signation, thou canst discharge no other.—
- Let us all learn to improve the present
- time; for on the instant moment, eternity
- depends.

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S E R M O N II.

The State of Man in this World considered.



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S E R M O N II.

The State of Man in this World considered.

JOB v. 6, 7.

*Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust,
neither doth trouble spring out of the ground:
Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks
fly upward.*

THE evils of human life, have in all ages of the world been made, by some one or other, objections to those perfections of infinite wisdom and goodness, which we justly ascribe to God. The many difficulties that attend our conceptions of the rule of divine Providence, we have very good reason to believe, arise more from those imperfections of our nature which we constantly experience, than from any defect in the Supreme Being, all of whose at-

tributes must, like himself, be infinite. And though we must readily allow that we can form no conceptions of God, but what we gather from the operations of his providence; and are left to judge of his perfections by the displays he has afforded us of them in his works; yet it by no means follows, that the errors mankind have fallen into, respecting either the nature or providence of God, are owing to a deficiency of evidence in proof of his infinite perfections, or wise method of moral administration. A further argument in proof of this is, that the scheme of divine Providence, as far as our limited power can trace it, is to be vindicated by reason, as agreeable to infinite wisdom and perfect benevolence. If indeed it could not be cleared in every instance, and the ways of Providence should in some cases appear dark and mysterious; yet, from the proofs we do really see, and the evidences we all have of his eternal power, and wisdom and goodness, we ought most reasonably

to conclude, that all the divine dispensations would bear the same signature, could they be sufficiently known — before we attempt in any instance to arraign consummate wisdom, we ought to remember how frail we are. —

These thoughts are premised, in order to pave the way for the profitable discussion of this subject. Our intention is not to indulge murmur and complaint against human life, and all its joys. Not to recount the few blessings, and many infelicities, that heaven, either with a parsimonious, or rigorous hand, bestows, or inflicts : not to mourn over the lot of human being, as over the grave of deceased hope : not to point out each scene of distress, as the real character of this world's happiness : but to vindicate the ways of God ; to reconcile us to this state of being in which infinite wisdom hath placed us ; to make such an estimate of human life, as shall teach us the true worth of our

enjoyments ; to delineate the true features of happiness or misery, in order to fit those, who have not as yet sustained the load of calamity, to bear it with fortitude whenever it be laid upon them ; and to encourage those who at present feel its greatest pressure. — Yes, the man of trouble, he who has felt the sharpest pangs of adversity, shall be taught, even in his afflictions, to rejoice, admire and adore. —

Though the wise and beneficent author of our being has made ample provision for our happiness ; suited our conveniencies to our wishes ; given no desires for happiness, which we cannot attain, or enjoy ; diversified this scene with a thousand prospects of pleasure and delight ; formed the human heart susceptible of various pleasing sensations and emotions, whether it beat in the responsive harmony of friendship, or dilate into the generous feeling of universal benevolence : though he has afforded certain stages of

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refreshment during our toils, many places of rest in our pilgrimage, much to allay our pains, and much to assuage our grief, much to comfort and much to delight; yet with all these bright characters, are mixt shades of nameless degrees. The same divine hand tempers alike the serious and the gay; the beautiful, and that which hath less power to please. The same infinite wisdom that cloaths the day in its splendor, and wraps the night in its sable mantle, makes the day of prosperity to arise, and introduces the night of trouble.

Though our possessions of good are many, and our wishes more, yet ruin shall await the one, and disappointment the other. Though our desires of attainable good are vehement, our expectations are not always answered. Though there are in the world many prospects to charm and delight us; the day is not always clear, nor are we always disposed to view them. Though the human heart is formed ca-

pable of much pleasure and exaltation; though friendship might warm, and benevolence feed more than its vital fire; yet it is a mansion too, where hatred, revenge, envy and remorse, with a whole company of the most outrageous and tormenting guests, may reside.—Though we have respite allowed us from toil, many repasts to delight us, and many supports in the journey of life; yet dangers ever lie in wait by the side of every path; and many accidents will befall us, though there be a balm for every wound, and a cure for every disorder.

As the happiness of human life can be derived from no other source but inexhaustible goodness, so neither do the evils of it proceed from any other. Calamities and afflictions come not forth from the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.—It is not the hand of chance that directs them to any of mortal men—we owe not our sufferings to a blind necessity,

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or fatal doom to pain ; but to the wise disposals of heaven—to the appointments of eternal wisdom—and yet though these preside, *man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.*—As this is the very state of being upon which we propose to vindicate divine Providence, it will be necessary, to take a cursory view of man's imperfect state in this world.—

+ The words of the text point out trouble as the general lot : that it is as natural to expect calamity in human life, as to see the sparks of fire ascend ; and that all who are born into this world, are as certainly born to trouble, as they are to the light of the sun. And ever since the sun first rose to enlighten this earth, there has not been one exceptive instance—the doom of suffering trouble in this world is as irreversible as the sentence of death.—No man can shew a better title to uninterrupted happiness in this state of being, than he can to immortality here.—Where

is the breast that never heav'd a sigh? Where the heart that never suffered from disappointment, desire or envy?—Where breathes the man who never encountered difficulties?—who never experienced trouble?—Where shall we find him?—Earth knows not such a being—the sun never rose upon such a vacant mortal as this—no! it finds us all encumbered with trouble, anxiety, distress, and pain at the breaking day, nor sees us more disengaged when it retires at night.—But to be more particular.—Let us take an impartial view of man, from his natal hour to the close of life—let us consider him in each stage of existence—let us contemplate his rising-day, his meridian glory, and his setting honor, and see whether our estimate of human life answer to the description of the text, *that man is born unto trouble, as the sparks of fire ascend.*

This scene of being opens with sorrow. As man is born to pain, so it is that of ano-

ther that gives him being. Bewailings are the first language he utters. Unconscious of his state, and helpless in himself, he owes every thing to foreign aid, and subsists by another's care—his own hand, unable to supply his wants, or defend him from danger, his own strength, too feeble for his support, are forced to solicit aid from the arms of maternal tenderness.—In infancy, trifles amuse, disgust and pain—perpetual anxieties attend the little disappointments that necessarily take place in this capricious state. Tears are the tribute of each day for the blessings of existence—At length the novelties and trifles, that at first excited his admiration, and kept his attention awake, cease to amuse. The youth, impatient of controul, warm with desire, sanguine in expectation, elate with hope, sure of success, enters the world—where either pleasure or business afford the pleasing prospect of much emolument, and enjoyment.

Upon the trial, he finds by sad experience, that his expectations of happiness were very disproportionate to the satisfactions he has enjoyed—he hurries on heedless in the pursuit, till his passions and appetites are all fully sated; then disgust arises, self reproach harrasses his mind; from self reproach arises discontent; from discontent an aversion to please, or be pleased—and the man, who once thought the world could not be sufficiently enjoyed, finds his pain, from the insufficiency of all it can afford.

Human life hastens away, whether we pass the present moment in joy, or spend it in lamentation—the hour of age at length arrives; which serves in general for little more than a dull comment upon past pleasures, or painful recollection of past follies—at this period, the bodily frame is oftentimes afflicted with pains and diseases, which make the mind captious and severe; and the last stage of man's existence here, is generally such, that he wishes for

the hospitable grave, long before death gives its awful summons.—These are the troubles that mortal flesh is heir to—this is the inheritance to which we are born—There are other troubles, which we experience from what we call accidental causes; which happen so frequently, that you may place them all to the general account of human calamity—sickness and pain are the constant attendants of man—they belong not to any particular age or condition. With these calamities human life is a burden—all the bright scene of nature fades upon the eye that languishes in sickness—there can be no pleasure where the correspondent senses are wanting, or made insensible of impressions—and though it must be readily confessed, that the greater part of our pains are the consequence of our own folly; yet, from the imperfection of our nature, we are liable to fall into them. And though no fatal necessity should hurry us into those irregularities, from whence such evils arise, yet we are con-

stantly exposed to innumerable temptations which may thus betray us.

But grant that a man is entirely free from these bodily complaints.—We will suppose one who never knew the languor of disease, nor the severity of pain; whose sprightly spirits flow on in the chearful current of uninterrupted ease: allow him but a heart sensible of feeling for another's distress, and he at once becomes the son of affliction.—The friend of his bosom; the partner of his social joys; the child of his youth, might suffer under a painful disorder; or, what is still more—be torn, for ever torn from his embraces by the cruel hand of relentless death.—If ambition lead to its airy pursuits, and for these a man shall forego the substantial titles of father, husband, friend; the fear of a rival shall disturb him—the jealousy of rising merit shall torment his breast—the fear of losing the popular voice, or the favour of him

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who first exalted him, shall fill the mind with perpetual uneasiness and pain.

This the condition of man !—If such be his troubles, and such his disquietudes, where are the blessings of Providence to be found ?—Amidst the wrecks of human happiness are the favours of heaven to be sought ?—What, are its blessings so thinly scattered, that only here and there the boon of human felicity is bestowed ?—Must tenfold trouble be thrown into the scale, to ballance against one single scruple of bliss, weighed out by the parsimonious hand of heaven ?—Cease these complaints, ye murmuring sons of men—God is neither weak in his power, defective in his wisdom, or sparing in his bounty—this is the lot of human life, that man might humble himself, submit and adore.—Had this state been less diversified with evil, the eternal state had been totally forgotten—this state abounds with so many blessings, and is so well accommodated to our passions

and enjoyments, that all the evils and miseries, of which we so lamentably complain, are hardly sufficient to wean our affections from, or break off our strong attachments to it—if our happiness met with no interruption and alloy here, in the present state, and instant moment, would centre all our desires and pursuits. We should be confined to a point of existence :—We should not live for futurity.—Instead of complaining against, adore the beneficence of God, who, amidst all the disappointments, pains, afflictions, and troubles of life, hath afforded us so much to please and satisfy, that scarce the darkest scenes, and heaviest sorrows, are sufficient to make us consider how frail we are, so as to apply ourselves to heavenly wisdom.—

If we were to meet with no trials, where would be our fortitude ?—if no temptations, where our virtue ?—if no afflictions, where our resignation ?—if no disappoint-

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S E R M O N II.

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ments in our worldly pleasures, what would become of our attention to heavenly realities?—If riches and the pleasures of this world did not decay, where would be our desires of a treasure that waxeth not old, eternal in the heavens?—If we were to meet with no ill treatment from others, how would the god-like disposition of forgiveness be formed?—If we found no difficulties, how could we shew our patience?—If here were no toil, should we long for eternal rest that remains for the people of God?—

This state of being is designed to train us up to immortal felicity.—The Scripture represents it as a warfare and race; as a scene of constant trial, vexation, suffering and pain.—To him that overcometh, shall the reward be given—to him that perseveres, sound the trumpet of applause—to *them, who, by a patient continuance in well doing, shall seek for honor, glory, and immortality, shall be given a crown of glory,*

that shall never fade away.—There is not one virtue or moral excellence, but what in the very nature of things, and by the Christian dispensation, is perfected by that very state of trouble and trial, which we have shewn to be the real condition of human life.—This then is a sufficient vindication of divine Providence in the permission of those evils, which, in the wise scheme of its administration, are perfective of the spiritual happiness of God's moral, intelligent offspring.—

I shall close this discourse with an address to two very different characters.—

First, to that man, whose particular condition and circumstances may induce him to think, that the picture we have exhibited of human life is overcharged, and darkened with too deep a shade: the other, who, from experience, knows it bears the true character of the original.—

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There are, whose wishes the goodness of God has prevented—who have found more enjoyment, and higher satisfaction in life, than they expected ever to have met with—the path of life has been smooth to their feet—the stream of felicity flowed smoothly along—their bark has not been tossed by violent storms, but gently wafted by propitious gales.—Their couch hath been easy when they reposed themselves; and they have awoke to pleasure, and to profit—they wrap themselves in the soft mantle of ease and security, and are tempted to say, *my happiness, like a mountain, standeth strong, I shall never be moved*—strange as this might appear, the known vicissitudes of human life, its pains and disappointments considered; men generally lose every sense of danger, when thus sheltered from the storm.—Thoughtless mortal! can riches arm thee against one pain incident to humanity?—Can they break the lance of death? or purchase one moment's reprieve from the

grave?—Is the calm, thou hast hitherto enjoyed, the sure presage of a stormless passage through the voyage of life?—Art thou all indolence and inactivity, because never called forth to the combat?—Hath the scene of prosperity been so unclouded, that thou art resolved no future troubles shall give thee pain?—Canst thou part with the friend of thy bosom, and determine to forget all thou hast enjoyed, because thou wilt bury thy present grief, and give all thy life to festivity and joy?—Dost thou wish to be excluded the privilege of being taught, in the school of adversity, the important lessons of resignation, and contentment? | If this be the case, what shall support thee in the day of trouble?—With what fortitude wilt thou enter upon the inheritance to which thou art born? thou son of calamity, thou heir of sorrow!—Wilt thou throw off the burden, and refuse to sustain the load?—Vain the attempt!—resist not Omnipotence—defy not infinite power—learn, from the

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true estimate of human life, to prepare thy mind for every disaster—to fortify thy soul with magnanimity and faith; this is the armour with which alone thou canst sustain the attack of trouble, and onset of misfortunes.—

It is a much more agreeable task to comfort the distressed, than to correct the guilty.—It is with pleasure, therefore, I turn my address to the man of affliction.— I am not ashamed to claim kindred with him, or own him as my friend—the common lot of human life links me close to him—I had rather afford such an one a moment's comfort, than spend hours of thoughtless merriment with him, who never knew the moral discipline of trouble. I would sacrifice whole days of pleasure, (of which, like Solomon, we can only say it is pleasant madness) to relieve the pensive, dejected mind of him who sorrows, and ease, by participation, the pains of him who mourns.—In this view, lead me

to the house of mourning, rather than that of feasting. — Who would not rather comfort the fatherless and widow, and by consolation, aid them to take the necessary supports of life, (than sit down to a luxurious banquet, where the tribute of thanksgiving is hardly offered up to heaven ?

Bring me then to the habitation of him who sits retired in the inmost dwelling; whose sincere grief shuns the inspection of the common eye — let me enter, with awe and humility, this recess, sacred to humanity, piety and virtue. — Son of affliction ! thy calamities make thee my friend — born like thee to sorrow, I compassionate thy misfortunes — the troubles thou dost now experience, might so soon be my own, that I now bespeak thy sympathy in my distress, whenever the hour of misfortune arrives. Then I claim the offices of a man — then I will expect from thee those duties, which now, from my very soul, I discharge. —

What are thine afflictions, but the hand of heaven, teaching thee the important lessons of submission and humility?—Descend not thy misfortunes from above?—no power below is equal to the stroke; and the power from above, if confided in, shall enable thee to sustain it—it shall strike off the fetters of vanity and sin—the chastisement shall correct every vicious habit of thy soul—Do calamities and afflictions of various kinds press hard upon each other? Come they in such quick succession, that they appear one continued series of trouble?—Are all thy hopes disappointed? thy schemes frustrated? Do all things conspire against thy peace?—If thy trust in God doth not fail—if thy submission be genuine—and thy humility of proper growth, *all things shall work together for thy good.*—Dost thou complain, that all thy satisfactions here have been more than compensated with a greater number of distresses? Doth the period of thy life serve for little more than

to recount the numberless evils? — Is every scene dark? — If thy views are exalted by religion, and thy soul animated with Christian hope, thou wilt be persuaded, that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed. — Hast thou sown in trouble, and watered the harvest with tears? be not dismayed, thou shalt reap immortal fruits. — Art thou ready to complain of the lot of humanity — and say to thy Creator, why hast thou made me thus, liable to misfortune, obnoxious to trouble, the heir of sorrow, and child of woe? — suppress the murmur — check the complaint, and in patience possess thy soul! — Keep all its powers in subjection — regulate all thy passions — subdue all rebellion in thy breast — think not, that thy misfortunes are inflicted as instances of the divine displeasure; for know, that *whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.* I grant with thee, that no afflictions are for the

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present joyous, but grievous — human nature cannot but feel the disagreeable effects — but if they are properly improved, they shall produce the fruits of righteousness and peace. — Dost thou seek for a period to all thy sufferings; and think life, short as it is, too long to endure, what thou hast reason to expect will be thy portion of evil; and that nothing in this world will compensate for all thy labour and submission, and that no other time will come when thy happiness shall commence? — consider, death hath a thousand avenues leading to its peaceful mansions. Its doors stand everlastingly open to receive mankind. Through these thou art to pass to regions of uninterrupted joy. Where the former things shall be remembered no more for ever. Where there shall be no more crying, sorrow, care, or pain — from whence every trouble shall be banished, and all afflictions eternally excluded — where God, the fountain of happiness, shall be all in all — where the captain of

thy salvation, who himself was made perfect by suffering, shall reward thee with a crown of glory, that shall never fade away. —

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The Christian Course.



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S E R M O N III.

The Christian Course.

1st Ep. C O R. ix. 24.

—— *So run, that ye may obtain.*

THE wisdom of our holy religion is in nothing more evident, than in its being so well adapted to the capacities of mankind; representing to them their duty in such a manner, and enforcing it by such motives, as are peculiarly fitted to engage their attention, and excite them to practice.

The happiness of the future world, of which Christianity hath made sufficient discovery, is represented as consisting in the honors and glories of a kingdom, suitable to those notions of grandeur and magnificence which here we entertain.—

The exaltation of the saints, though in spiritual felicity, is spoken of, under the characters of kings, and priests. Many things are set forth to us, under similes and comparisons. Illustrations are taken from sensible objects to inforce a divine moral, or doctrine; of which, the parables, and discourses our Lord delivered, are distinguished instances.—In like manner, the Christian life, considered as a constant opposition to every temptation that the world presents; and every difficulty, which in the way of duty we are to encounter; the honor of success, and the disgrace of being overcome; the reward that shall be ensured, by acquitting ourselves well; and the emulation with which we ought to strive, is beautifully compared to a warfare, or a race. The last of this our text alludes to—*Know you not, that they which run in a race, run all? but one receiveth the prize; so run, that ye may obtain!*

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These words very naturally lead us to make the following remark ; viz. that many may run in the Christian course ; or, in other words, engage in religion, who shall not obtain its prize—the causes of this are various ; the most obvious are the following :

I. Some begin with too much warmth, and too eager zeal. — Religion shall at first engage all their attention ; its rewards excite all their hopes ; and its denunciations awaken all their fears — they enter upon a religious course, with the impetuosity of the most sanguine hope — they unfortunately represent the race as easy to be run ; suppose themselves equal to the length of it ; superior to all that may happen to embarrass them, and sure of the reward — at length, their ardor grows cold ; they find perpetual toil too great a mortification ; and unremitted labour, a task, to which their fortitude and strength are by no means equal — the novelty of

the thing is past—the first raptures of devotion subside—the active spirits, that sent them vigorously on, begin to faint; but little of the laborious path is trod, much lies before them to be passed, ere they can gain the prize—others appear as indolent as themselves; and as for those, who proceed with uninterrupted step, and unshaken resolution, they are supposed possessed of superior strength, or a better judgment to manage an equal degree of it. If at any time their ardor should be re-kindled, it is but temporary; it soon becomes languid; at length, activity remits its diligence; they tire, faint, and give up the cause.

Great caution is necessary upon the commencement of any great design.—Whatever in this life is to be pursued through various paths, and ever kept in view in all circumstances, and to which every thing in which we engage has a reference, calls upon our prudence to form

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a consistent plan, and upon our wisdom properly to execute it. — And shall more prudence and wisdom be esteemed necessary in our secular affairs, than in religion, the most important undertaking? Shall we engage in this, without maturely weighing its consequences, or seriously considering its nature? Shall we proceed in it, without that moderation, which shall serve to keep us in an even constant tenor of behaviour? — Surely that work, at least, ought to be begun well, that is to be pursued as the first object, which remains ever indispensable upon us; and whose effects will extend beyond the grave, and give the complexion of happiness to endless ages. —

The human mind is not formed capable of being always extended upon the wing of rapture and emotion. — The sublimer passions of the soul, it is true, under the direction of reason, aid us to make considerable advances towards perfection. —

But, from the union of the soul with the corporeal part, it will often happen, that these finer feelings lose all their energy; and the mind, comparatively speaking, will appear enervate and weak. There is therefore a necessity of some steadier power than the passions, to direct and manage, whatever degree of strength remains at any time to be exerted.

If men will engage in religion, from the warmth of imagination alone, without properly considering what it calls upon them to perform; the necessary difficulties they are to encounter; what they may suffer in the cause, respecting present happiness: or do not fortify their minds, with principles drawn from the excellence, importance, and rewards of religion, it is not to be wondered at, that a few dangers shall alarm, inconsiderable difficulties deter, and a few temptations overcome them—not that the warmest zealot perseveres the longest—the true Christian is one,

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who runs his race with such caution, that he seems always rather fearful of miscarriage, than boastingly anticipating the reward.

II. Others there are, who think that by being within the prescribed bounds, they shall at length attain the goal. The very profession of being religious, seems sufficient with some; and they make this open profession of it, an excuse for the omission of duties, which religion indifferently enjoins—they close with religion just so far as corresponds with their present ease and enjoyment, but are resolved to bridge themselves of no pleasure, or give up any indulgence, when, in the course of duty, an inordinate appetite is to be indulged, difficulties encountered, and temptations overcome. — All the outward shews of engaging in the Christian course shall appear—that is, the externals of religion shall be observed—and these shall be substituted for an internal, habitual frame of

holiness and virtue, founded upon a disposition to religious improvements, and the sincerest design of cultivating the pure and refined spirit of righteousness and truth.

Persons of such a cast, look upon others of more activity, who press forward with constant zeal, as bestowing much unnecessary labour, and toiling with too much patience, to procure a reward, which they themselves hope to obtain by slower, yet as sure advances : and which they are contented should rest unpossessed, till they shall, by the slow step of indolence, assume the honors. — But the constitution of heaven is this—that nothing great can be procured, but by laborious industry, and toil—these not only best ensure, but heighten the possession of any good—and the happiness of heaven itself, though the gift of infinite grace, requires the strenuous endeavours of mankind to obtain it.

The language of the conduct of such persons we are now describing, is this ; the crown of immortal glory, will be my reward, whether I engage sooner or later — and if I have been sometimes remiss in that discipline I ought to have used, to fit me for the Christian course ; and wanted that activity and perseverance, that would have enabled me to receive the early prize, yet, from that attention I do pay to religion, and that small degree of zeal I exert in the cause, I shall receive some correspondent reward : and the lowest degree of celestial happiness is much beyond what earth can grant, or my mind form any conception of — as to the arduous undertaking of some, the forward zeal of others, the unremit- ted activity of those who toil, and bear every adverse accident with patience, and still retain their design ; this is a task, which heaven, in its infinite goodness, could never assign to man, made for hap- piness, and to whom is afforded every

thing richly to be enjoyed!—But what scheme of felicity could heaven itself better devise for mankind, than that, which the gospel hath divulged?—And if the eternal enjoyment of the future world depends upon a proper resistance of temptations, and forming those virtues, which result from trial here, how absurd is it to allege that present happiness is to be enjoyed, whatever influence this might have upon our future state of immortal felicity?—But we may observe,

III. That while some enter upon the Christian race with too much warmth, and others continue the course with too much indolence, others there are, who keep not a steady eye upon the recompence of reward; who turn aside from the direct path of duty, and follow the uncontrouled bent of every desire, excited or amused by every trifling object that catches their attention.

Indeed the world, through which the course of the Christian lies, presents many tempting scenes : some deludingly gay ; others enchantingly grand. — To each of these a path opens from that of direct obedience : and heaven, in its gracious permission, hath allowed some refreshment by the way amidst all our difficulties ; nor denies us some remissions from laborious toil, to revive our strength and restore our spirits, to send us on our way rejoicing. — But if, instead of refreshment, we sit down to the banquet of luxury ; instead of a necessary suspension of labour, and proper rest, we recline in indolence, and repose on the bed of sloth, how is it possible that we should arise with renewed vigour ? — What inclination or strength shall we either feel or exert ? It is dangerous to rest any where long. We ought always to keep the reward in view ; or else so swiftly to continue the course, that the objects we pass by, should scarcely be discerned. — How often is the path

of duty transgressed, in order to acquire riches, and the honors of this world? and when once these engage men in their warm pursuit, they generally lose sight of superior enjoyments — there is this amazing power in riches, they so fix the thoughts and attention of men to the present world, that all the natural hopes of future happiness, are intirely sunk in one of the most despicable, degrading passions that can seize or actuate the human breast. — Gracious heaven ! that man, formed for an immortality of spiritual and refined felicity, should deviate from the road that leads to it, either to contemplate, or enjoy the comparatively despicable trash, hid deep in the bowels of the earth to be conceal'd, as it were, from man.

IV. Others are retarded in their course by the very encumbrances they voluntarily bear. — In allusion to such cases as these, the apostle gives the following advice : *Let us lay aside every weight and the sin*

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that doth easily beset us; and run with patience the race that is set before us.

The objects that tempt us to deviate from the path of duty, are those that perpetually furrround us. They make up the diversified scenes, which, by artful representation, render the theatre of life speciously good, and enchantingly alluring. If we suffer these too much to employ our attention, we shall find them prove considerable impediments in our Christian course: for in exact proportion as they gain upon us, just so much the more difficult will our race prove.

Every thing earthly has a tendency, though not a fatal necessity, to load us with a weight, that will greatly retard our advance towards perfection. Many pursuits in which we voluntarily engage, are either quite foreign from the path of religion, or else, unfit us for walking in it with that caution which is necessary.

The entanglements of the world, leave us not at full liberty to exert ourselves in the Christian race—the robe of honor, and state no more unfits the wearer for activity and flight, than the temptations which arise therefrom, unfit us for the Christian course.—The fetters of pleasure as effectually constrain and confine, as chains of slavery, though of adamantine force: and who can hope to obtain the prize, when under a twofold disadvantage, bearing a burden, and being fettered also?

The design of this discourse, leads us to shew, in what manner we are successfully to run the Christian race: or, in other words, how we are to engage, and behave ourselves in religion.—*So run that ye may obtain.*

In this view of the subject, the following things appear essentially requisite.—We should prepare ourselves by tem-

perance—enter upon our Christian race with resolution—and—persevere with activity, and diligence. *They that strive in the race*, says the apostle, *are temperate in all things*. It was an usual custom with those who contended in the Grecian games and exercises, to which our text evidently alludes, to prepare themselves by the most abstemious method of living; inuring themselves to toil; and by the exactest moderation, to keep their powers in full strength and activity. Temperance no less conspires to the health of the mind, than it does to the sanity of the body. Indolence, of every kind, tends to relax, and enfeeble the powers. It creates an uneasiness that unfits a man for that strenuous exertion of himself, which depends upon the mind being free from every other concern, but what respects the present business.—When the mind is not under the influence of any unruly passion, it is fitted to employ itself in a way suitable to its exalted nature—and this is

to form grand designs of enterprize—to acquire the most substantial and permanent happiness—and as temperance is the only means of regulating every desire of the soul; and religion the most amiable object, and its pursuits the most noble that can engage the human mind; the virtue of the first importance, when we enter upon a religious course, is TEMPERANCE. Next to this preparation of ourselves by temperance, we are to enter upon our religious course, with

RESOLUTION — There are difficulties that will perpetually arise, against which, if we are not in some measure guarded by these, we shall infallibly be overcome. We ought therefore to make strong purposes to resist every opposition we may meet with, and to surmount every danger that shall occur—a few distresses ought not to affright, nor a few calamities deter us. If at any time we find our resolution grow faint, our courage fail;

or our zeal cool, then ought we to exert ourselves the more, and gain a conquest greater in itself than those for which heroes have reaped their honors, and by which they have immortalized their names, and which but few, if any of them, could achieve, viz.—CONQUER OURSELVES.—*He that ruleth his own spirit, is greater than he that taketh a city.*—We ought to rouse the reluctant spirit from indolent repose, into activity; and never to fear the difficulties we encounter, so much as falling under, and being oppressed by them.—The more labour we use, the more strength shall we acquire—the more we toil, the easier will our task become.—It is but going just so far in opposition to ourselves, and in the road of difficulty, to make the moderation of ourselves, and the path of duty, easy and natural to us.

In our Christian race, we ought always to consider where our greatest danger lies;

and guard against the evil that might prove most fatal to us.—The inequalities of the road of life ought well to be known, that we may suit ourselves to the ground over which we are to pass—the steep hill of thorny adversity, is gained alone by patient endurance, and unremitting labour—the easy descent of prosperity must be trod with deliberate, and cautious step, lest we hurry down too fast, and lose our footing, while we think we stand secure.

ACTIVITY AND DILIGENCE ought ever to await us.—No one part of the Christian course, *i. e.* no one duty of religion should remain unpractised—activity and diligence are justly esteemed leading virtues in all secular concerns: they lie at the foundation of fortune and success; and religion demands their assistance, as much as any other thing; and calls very often, and with great importunity upon us to exert them.—They are

made necessary from the frequent danger there is of remissness and indolence.— Whatever religion calls upon us to perform, its sacred dictates ought readily to be obeyed: and in whatever we engage, all the powers of the mind should be exercised.

As Christians, we have important lessons to learn, and various virtues to practise: and diligence is as absolutely necessary in the acquisition of the one, as it is in the discharge of the other.

Where important business lies upon our hands, it calls for the most diligent performance of it—and it must be acknowledged, that religion is the most important work, of the most interesting nature, and more glorious in its prospects, than any thing else in the whole circle of nature, that can employ our thoughts, or take up our attention.—Suitable to its obligations, views and rewards, ought to

be our activity, diligence and zeal. — And here we must observe, that the business of religion ought never to be considered as ended: it remains ever binding upon us—we are always to be engaged in it—our obligations to duty reach to, nor indeed are they dissolved by death; and their effects extend themselves through eternity itself—the strongest motives to perseverance are hence derived, that the human heart can possibly feel.

Notwithstanding the difficulties that may await us in our Christian course, yet virtue and religion, with all their exercises of temperance, resignation, fortitude and diligence, and self-denial too, afford the mind such solid and lasting pleasure, that they will bear the comparison at least, in point of happiness, with the pleasures of sin: but when the glories of the future state break forth upon these objects, one have not to imagine, that heaven could have granted, or man

received more, to make him supremely blessed.

If any shall complain that religion calls them to laborious toil, to encounter difficulties, and overcome temptations; consider, that men have done these things, to acquire the fading breath of popular applause, and a pageant wreath of dying flowers.—But—if things so widely different in excellence, may be compared,—consider the recompense of Christian reward—a crown of immortal glory—honors that shall satisfy, not merely from the applause of others,—but, with the approbation of the angelic host, shall commence a state of uninterrupted felicity—immortality shall lay open all the stores of unspeakable joy—there we shall, after all our labour, find everlasting rest—the victorious Christian shall enjoy the honors of his conquests; and shall wear the crown of immortality, without any anxiety or fear—and bear no other weight,

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but *that of a far more exceeding, an eternal weight of glory.*

Let us hear the apostle's solemn charge—*Be sober and vigilant: gird up the loins of your mind—acquit yourselves like men—be strong in the Lord—lay aside every weight and the sin that doth easily beset you, and run with patience the race that is set before you.* Consider, men alone are not witnesses of your actions, nor are they to reward your desert—the martyrs and patriarchs of old—the angels of heaven, are the cloud of witnesses, with which you are surrounded—nay more, JESUS the mighty judge of all, who himself was made perfect by sufferings, waits to reward us for our activity, zeal and success.—Let us then, agreeable to the apostle's request—*be blameless, as the sons of God—without rebuke among those, to whom we should strive to shine as the lights of the world—holding forth the word of life, that we may rejoice in the day of Christ, that we have not run in vain,*

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nor laboured in vain—and receive the recompence of reward promised unto all those, who, by a patient continuance in well doing, shall seek for honor, glory, and immortality.

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JEREM. xii. 5.

If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?

THE prophet Jeremiah, appearing before God, in his sacred character of one commissioned from him to warn his people of their sin, after a devout acknowledgment of the everlasting righteousness of the Lord, with pious enquiry, expostulates with him concerning his judgments, — *Wherefore, says he, doth the way*

of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy, that deal very treacherously?—Thou hast planted them, yea they have taken root; they grow—yea they bring forth fruit.—He next appeals unto God, for the sincerity of his own heart and conduct; at the same time, mourning over the disconsolate state of the land, and the deplorable effects of the sin of those that dwell therein, in the following pathetic manner—*But thou, O Lord! knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee:—how long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein?—the beasts are consumed, and the birds; because they said, He shall not see our last end.*—This devout solicitude, is answered in the words of the text; which, though delivered in the usual figurative way of ancient prophetic writings, very evidently contain this argument—that if the prophet failed in his attempt to reform sinners of a less notorious bad character, there

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was no reason to expect better success with the more abandoned.—The thought is urged with peculiar force, by a reduplication of figure, and rising boldness of expression—*If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if, in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?* No truth, we presume, will be more generally admitted, than that which the text, thus understood, contains; and this will very naturally lead our thoughts to a subject of equal, if not much greater importance; which is, that men oftentimes make their abstaining from more open and flagitious crimes, an excuse for their private vices, and less enormities of conduct.—They deceive themselves, and think they are secure from temptations to greater iniquity—they suppose, their small offences by no means argue a general disposition to sin: that when it appears open, and

is seen at full length, in all its horrid colours and deformity, that it will shock their mind, and deter them from forming any intimacy with it.—But among many others, this is one delusion of sin: it artfully makes its approach by small degrees: it doth not at once make an open breach, and attempt to lay all the soul waste, by storm, and tempest—no—it first saps the foundation of innocence; watches a fair opportunity of assault, when caution is off its guard—when suspicion is asleep—when fortitude remits its laborious watching—then sin makes the onset, then—and only then, taketh MAN.

If this be the case, how very unreasonable and absurd is it to imagine, that we shall be able to conquer a greater, when we have been overcome by a less temptation?—to think, that the mind will be fortified against a stronger, when it has been subdued by a weaker attack? to suppose, that after striving with one

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enemy, and falling before him, another of superior strength shall fall before us?— that if we are borne down by the easy current, and ineffectually resist its power, that we can conflict with the stormy sea, or escape its destruction?—But we will enter into the more particular discussion of the subject.

Man is endowed with reason—it is the distinguishing mark and glory of his nature: when he acts agreeable to its dictates, the end of divine wisdom is answered—when this principle is properly informed, and its laws obeyed, man finds peace, consolation, and joy.—Passion and prejudices blind this discerning principle, prevent its operation, destroy its activity. defeat its purposes, lower its aspirings, frustrate its attempts, and perplex its designs.—For the proof of this, take all those melancholy instances that every day presents to our view, of the dominion of vice, and its tyranny over the minds

and actions of men : see these so entirely debased, that the Scriptures are well authorized to characterize the wicked, by *fools*—devoid of all wisdom and reason, losing the distinguishing part of their beings, and defeating the benevolent intentions of God, evident in their moral endowments. —It is therefore an essential part of charity, not only to represent, but also to endeavour to detect the delusions by which sin effects the destruction of the deceived votary to it.

It must be acknowledged, that many there are, who, though they offend in less matters, will not go to the extremities of vice—but is it not very absurd to think, that, for this reason, they never will?—that because some parts of duty are transgressed, and others omitted, that those which remain shall be more conscientiously discharged?—Virtue and vice are essentially different in their own nature and tendency—the cause of the one can

never flourish, while the interest of the other is promoted — they are altogether irreconcilable — virtue can have no security from vice; and vice can form no intimacy with virtue — they shun each other — they are, in their nature, at an infinite distance. — Say, what communion can the unsullied light of virtue have with the obscene and palpable darkness of sin? Not that we are to suppose, that in order to form what may properly be denominated a virtuous character, every blemish of sin must be absent — that the robe of virtue can be worn, without any spot of moral defilement — imperfection cleaves to man — *there is none that liveth, and sineth not, no, not one.* — but then we must consider, that it is the indulgence of vice, and the deliberate choice of it, that discriminate in this case — where no such indulgence, and deliberate choice are found; where the intentions of the mind, are prevaillingly good, and no evil affections habitually indulged and cherished,

that these, notwithstanding many imperfections, and some sudden transgressions of duty, form the virtuous character.— Every good man feels his faults.— Every sinner feels his iniquity—the former is sorry for, and disallows them—the latter extenuates, and seemingly approves his own conduct—this sorrow and disallowance, this extenuation and seeming approbation, essentially distinguish the characters.

It is to the man of vicious allowance, we are to address ourselves in the spirit of the text—the man who ventures upon iniquity, in some instances of an inferior sort, with the thought of his security from greater temptations—who pleads in excuse for his allowed transgressions, his freedom from all other vices—this is generally the case, when men are determined, at all hazards, to indulge those vices, to which they are particularly prone.—But what security can arise from

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hence? Men, as well as things, are subject to change — their passions continue not the same — by indulgence, a favourite vice is sometimes fairly worn out. — When this is the case, be assured, some other will as easily and successfully beset the man as the first. — If we practise only one sin, because we have greater temptations to this, than to any other; the case will be exactly the same, if any other vice should seize upon us with equal temptations: we shall fall as fatally by this, as we were subdued by the other; we shall cleave to it with like pleasure, practise it with equal avidity, suspend all duties for its indulgence, and delude ourselves as in the former instance.

The prepossessions in favour of duty are so strong, that men even plead their observance of it, in some instances, as an excuse for their violation of it in others: Thus it is, that they have been led to substitute something instead of obedi-

ence; hence take their rise all the oblations, ceremonies, and sacrifices of SUPERSTITION.—Mint and cummin were offered, while the weightier matters of the law, and the sacred virtues of human life, were neglected. Hence the boast of good works, before deceived mortals, to cherish the sin that sits closest to the depraved affection, to which the omniscient eye of God himself is privy.—God is not strict to mark iniquity, says the sinner, and plenteous in rewarding mercy—so that all my obedience will not pass unnoticed, and unrewarded—and the few offences I have committed, to which I was either constitutionally prone, or into which I was betrayed by those very imperfections mortal flesh is heir to, will surely be passed by, without strict animadversion, at least, without severity of judgment.—Thou fool!—heaven knows thy offerings are not the genuine fruits of obedience. Thy seeming virtues spring from a wrong food—a pure desire of serving thy God, in

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the true principle of obedience — if thy apparent virtue grew from this stock, not one rank weed of vice could have flourished so near it — nor think, if thy virtues were of genuine growth, that thou canst stand secure against all temptation — the ground is delusive on which thou hast set thy foot — virtue alone founds her habitation upon the rock of permanent strength. Why dost thou not oppose temptation at the first? — Hast thou acquired new strength from sin, to enable thee to conquer its future onsets? If thy fortitude was slain at the first blow, shall thy vigour be renewed by stronger attacks?

We generally suppose, some future period is much fitter for executing any arduous design, than the present time. We vainly imagine either that our strength will encrease, or that some accident will afford us a better opportunity to exert it : that we can disincumber ourselves at pleasure of the burden we bear ; and thus it

is, that with patient neck we bear the yoke of sin, and yield to its tyranny, even when its chains miserably afflict us. — We vainly think, that upon some future attack, we shall be able to summon up all our fortitude, and easily conquer the domineering foe ; and that we can enter into the service of virtue, whenever the cause of vice becomes hazardous, or our revolt from virtue is likely to be punished. — Vain delusion ! — perverted judgment ! — If the silken cords bind us fast, what will not the chains of iron do ? — If we fell by the first advances of sin, which generally comes with less than all its power, what chance of success shall we have, when it employs all its artful stratagems to overcome us ? — We may as well suppose, that we can bear the perilous storms of adversity, when we have not been able to conflict with the common evils of life, as that we can stand against the powerful attacks of sin, when we have been already subdued by its artless wiles. — See

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curity is man's greatest enemy: and if ever we rest in it, after the grand foe, sin, hath made the least breach upon the soul, our ruin is very near absolute certainty. The destroyer vice, will soon throw all into horrid confusion — in vain shall we then attempt to rally our scattered powers, to summon our fortitude, or exert our courage — our best resolution will fail — we shall be amazed to find that so little of it remains — we shall be astonished to think how our strength is enervated; and how weakly all those virtues we vainly thought we were possessed of, exert themselves. — We shall now find, that they want the very energy necessary to their successful operation; the heavenly spirit that can alone give them force and power — at length, we shall basely submit — receive the oppressive chain of sin, with passive neck; and bear with abject submission our ignominious bondage. — All the goodly building of virtue will be levelled to the ground, and thrown into

ruinous confusion — its beauty all lost, its dignity all degraded, and its glory all eclipsed — vice will then exult, and domineer at large. — Instead of that liberty it once promised to its deluded votaries, when first it imposed its chain of bondage; instead of the empty hope, that futurity should bring no inconvenience — the sinner shall be in close confinement — himself shall be his own dungeon, of dread disquietude, where gloomy fear, horrid apprehension, and grim despair shall perpetually harrafs and torment him — that very mansion, thus converted, and thus inhabited, might have been the abode of virtue, with all her amiable and goodly train of pleasure, peace, harmony, self complacence, divine consolation, hope, faith and joy — all of whom joining together in delightful union, supporting and cheering the soul, inspiring her aims and exalting her views, lead her to prospects of the most desirable happiness which God, in his infinite goodness

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signed, and will finally give that virtuous man to enjoy, who has fulfilled his laws, obeyed his commandments, and, with noble aspiring, reached for immortal glory.

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Of disinterested and universal charity.



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Of disinterested and universal Charity.

ECCLES. xi. 1, 2.

Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days: give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.

THERE is a certain meanness, which those persons who are guilty of it, miscall economy, which hath its foundation in ostentation and pride. There are who will give alms when every eye can see the benefit; who, when withdrawn into privacy, feel but little commiseration for others distress.

Whenever a seeming virtue springs from any other source, but a true principle of duty, men are generally called to witness it — when the testimony of applause presides not in a man's own breast, he must solicit the approbation of the world — sometimes general calamities demand relief; then the small proportion that each one's beneficence bears to the sum of distress, pleads strongly in extenuation of affording no assistance at all. In this case, the man stands not alone, and therefore cannot boast of peculiar virtue; and where such an one finds no opportunity to exult in his pride, he will never be ambitious to triumph in his charity. — But must the still water alone, in which every object can be contemplated with pleasing lustre, bear the offering we make? — Are we afraid to cast the tribute into the general current of human calamity, lest it be carried beyond the reach of the eye of pride, and afford consolation to unknown distress, that enjoys the

bounty unaffected by particular gratitude, that noble distress of an ingenuous soul?

'To divest the thought of the figure.— shall we refuse to do good because the reward be only that of our own approbation, and no other immediately ensues? — *Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days.* — Think not the boon is lost when thus bestowed; that it sinks in the tide of general distress, never to be remembered any more! Though many storms shall arise, yet charity shall return richly laden with grateful acknowledgements of the sons of sorrow who have been relieved. To encrease the probability of such happy success, invent no excuse for not relieving present objects of distress, by supposing others are to be found who deserve it more: let not numbers define your bounty, or limit your charity; allowing your abilities equal to the demand upon your beneficence — *give a portion*

to seven and also to eight; for you know not what calamities of every complexion may abound; nor can you be sure, that the same misfortunes, which you have the power to redress, will not one time or other be your own. — Let your liberality then be proportionable to the expectation which in that situation you would entertain for your relief: while former munificence, thus principled, will plead the most in our favour under present misfortunes, it will at the same time be the best consolation under them. — What must that man endure, who when he is neglected in the day of his tribulation, finds no relief or satisfaction from himself — but has to accuse his own heart of the same treatment of others in their distress, which he himself now keenly feels?

The text naturally leads us to consider two parts of duty, and their several motives, *viz.*

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I. A disinterested ; and

II. An universal charity.

If true charity consist in a distribution of our goods to relieve our fellow creatures in distress, in an exact proportion to their calamities ; all other considerations that take place, either to determine us to deal out our bounty with a more liberal, or restrain it with a parsimonious hand, encroach just so much upon the true principle of disinterested benevolence.

In general, objects are relieved, who seem to have a double claim upon our charity, not from their peculiarity of distress, but upon some other account and circumstances, by which they are either endeared or recommended to us. This partiality, few, if any, are entitled to condemn, because there are scarcely any, but are under its influences : and though we must readily allow, that where the qualifications of

the person in distress are known, that these, if laudable, raise the idea of calamity, yet we ought never by any inordinate attachment to any one object of charity, to sink every other sensation in this particular commiseration.

Whenever any connection has virtue for its foundation, it has always much to plead in excuse for its partial regards; and it appears almost a violation of its principle, the very attempt to limit or controul it.—This is the case with all the social affections, which may centre in such a degree on some objects, as shall effectually destroy their operation with respect to others.

But though these partialities of our nature have much to plead in their behalf, and from the tender imperfections of nature, easily obtain a pardon; let any one enquire of himself, whether a disinterested manner of any man's bestowing a favour,

be not always an additional recommendation of it? and whether we do not conceive more exalted ideas of such an one's disposition of soul, than of his, whose benefits are bestowed under the immediate influence of preconceived affection, and the partiality of peculiar regards?—Our conception of the universal benefactor of mankind, must be properly formed by the complete ideas of such a benevolence; because the Deity can never be influenced by those passions, which betray us into partial affections. The divine mind is all-capacious, and his benevolence universal. Our benevolence ought always to be regulated by the apostolic rule, *giving, hoping for nothing again*. To perform any charitable office, under the full expectation of a retaliation of favours, is nothing else but a commutation of good, and leaves us little more to admire, than mutual confidence and honour.—Such an exchange of good offices, indeed, takes place, and is ranked in the catalogue of

virtues ; but it stands very far beneath the exalted virtue of disinterested charity. This interchange of benefits is to be esteemed little more than commercial morality ; and seems better calculated to support an agreeable harmony and refinement of manners, than to produce or nourish the God-like spirit of unbiaſſed benevolence. This diſinterested deſire of relieving the wants of mankind, and adminiſtring aſſiſtance under all their calamities, will greatly enlarge the powers of the mind : It will give a noble ſuperiority of character, and afford us an opportunity of enjoying, unenvying, and unenvyed all the happineſs our fellow creatures can communicate.—A man that would, to the utmoſt of his power, relieve the diſtreſſes of his kindred mortals, might juſtly look upon himſelf as entitled to partake in all their joys. For as his diſpoſition leads him ſo far into ſympathy with their calamities, it would be unjuſt to deny him the privilege of ſympathizing in their hap-

S E R M O N V. III

pinels. — But our charity ought not only to proceed from this disinterested principle, but we should cultivate,

II. An universal charity.

We are to *give a portion to seven, and also to eight.* — The number seven is used in the sacred writings as a number of perfection, to denote the excellence of things, and the extent of that to which it is applied; sometimes it is used indefinitely, for an undetermined number. The words *give a portion to seven, and also to eight*, include this precept. — Let your benevolence and charity be without any other limitations, than those which the circumstances you are in, the capacities you enjoy, and the wants of the person you relieve, may prescribe. True charity knows no bounds; and as the calamities of life are not confined to any certain number, degrees, or tribe of men, our acts of beneficence ought not to be

limited. It is true, that the objects of charity are so numerous, and occur so frequently, that our beneficence must be circumscribed. This then evidently proves the necessity of making a due choice in the distribution of our favours, and shews that such an œconomy ought to be observed that shall make our capacities of good as extensively useful as possible.

This principle of universal charity does not include a necessary obligation to succour all in distress : if this were the case, our duty, in many instances, would extend much beyond the reach of our capacities, and our obligations to it must be dispensed with : we are only to understand this principle as a generous and laudable desire of benefiting mankind, unlimited by any other consideration, but the want of power to relieve.

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I. From

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design of promoting the happiness of mankind, the true principle of universal benevolence suffers in exact proportion.—What an unjustifiable compliment is paid to ourselves, when the concurrence of others in our opinions, makes them the peculiar objects of our regards, and directs the stream of our beneficence to flow within the contracted channel of partiality!—but true charity, in no respect whatsoever, *seeketh her own*.

In general, there needs but little enlargement upon the reasonableness of particular virtues; this is felt whenever we honestly contemplate our duty: the grand business is, to present such motives to the mind, as shall effectually conduce to the practice of it.—Those which relate to the object now before us, arise

I. From the state of human affairs.

II. From the design and intention of divine Providence.

III. From self interest.—We will consider each.

The royal author of our text, exhorts to charity, from this consideration: *we know not the evil that shall be upon the earth.*—The sum of calamity upon the whole might be much greater than we are apt to imagine; and every act of beneficence lessens the general evil. The tablet of human life (could it be justly drawn) would, amidst its various colours of brighter hue, exhibit shades of various degrees.—'Tis true, we have every reason to imagine, that upon the whole the former would be prevalent. The goodness of God obliges us to make this conjecture. But how to adjust the large concerns of man exactly, to settle the grand account as relative to the whole, to ascertain the excess of happiness, is not with

the powers of humanity. — Sufficient is it for us to know, that so many evils do prevail, that universal disinterested charity will always be the characteristic excellence of human nature, its ornament and perfection.

The distresses which in general we behold, are not the most deplorable in themselves : the common suppliant submits without a blush to solicit alms of all he meets ; and from having been always involved in poverty, his ideas of happiness are accommodated to his state of penury.

—But there are others who feel a more delicate distress ; and instead of their misfortunes forcing them into the world to seek redress, the recollection of their past happier lot drives them into solitary retirement, there to lament their unhappy fate, to drop the tear of silent bewailing upon the unconscious ground, and waste the sigh of trouble in the desert air. — It is thus the widow deplores the loss of

him who was her best consolation under all the evils, and who enhanced all the joys of life; here it is that she hath no other satisfaction, but that of giving a loose to the tender emotions of her soul. This, together with that look which none but maternal eyes can *utter*, and no other objects but orphans call forth, completes the picture of woe.—Fly to their relief, ye stewards of the bounty of heaven!—With-hold not the treasure committed to your charge!—Ease, by your charitable distributions, that pain, which a mother's breast can only feel!—Sooth the sorrows you cannot wholly cure; and suspend the poignancy of grief, by overwhelming the soul with gratitude by your bounty, that the satisfied infant might cheer the fond parent's heart with the smile of fullness; and relieve her anxiety, by resting on the soft lap of repose.—This is distress, which, though withdrawn from the world, the inquisitive eye of charity will often discover; perhaps

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much oftner than general opinion would suspect.

Nor does the widow alone seek some sequestered place to pour forth her lamentation; other calamities claim the same privilege. —

See that man of merit, whom fortune hath not blessed—upon whom calamity hath exhausted her quiver—making an appeal to heaven for the sincerity of his soul.—That son of poverty, once knew the comforts of affluence. The poor never went from his door unsatisfied, nor did the hungry ever depart without food. But now—sad reverse of condition! some humbler lot must be the portion of his life; and without the charity of others, he must eat his scanty meal in the bitterness of his soul.

Ye lovers of virtue, raise his dejected mind; ye men of inferior merit, but su-

perior possessions, endeavour to exalt yourselves by your disinterested beneficence.

Others retire from the world afraid of its censure, and ashamed of those calamities their vices have procured—neither the council of wisdom, nor the relief of charity are here to be with-holden.—Nay let them *here* exert all their influences.—The man who retires from the world destitute of all its conveniencies; with no supports in his own mind, from having deserved well, and merited a better fate—ashamed of his distress, and untaught to solicit redress, enters his retirement under a disposition of mind that might prompt despair to the melancholy act of self destruction.—Ye fellow-mortals! pity, and relieve such a one, from the experienced imperfections of humanity.

The attempt to reveal each scene of human distress, were vain: they are com-

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licated with such an infinite variety of causes, that we have little more to contemplate than the leading features of each species of distress.—Let it be sufficient to remark, that not only these private miseries we have just described, are to be attributed to the same general account; but there are others of a more secret nature still, to which none but heaven and the unhappy sufferer's heart are witnesses. There are, who appear in the world with faces of counterfeit joy, who have hearts but ill at ease, who, as the poet expresses it—

Bury their woes in furrows of a smile.

We are not only ignorant of the evils that are upon the earth, with respect to others; but we know not what evils may be reserved for ourselves.—Riches are not for ever, respecting the duration of the present world—the vicissitudes of human life, are very reasonable motives to the right

improvement of every talent. Our possessions are precarious, and the bounties of heaven uncertain—this day might close upon our prosperity, and to-morrow's sunrise upon our misfortune. This day we may enjoy the unspeakable pleasure of relieving the fatherless and widow, of giving food to the hungry, cloathing to the naked, release to the captive, and succour to the distressed.—The morrow shall see us deprived of these capacities: we ourselves shall eat the bread of affliction, and become the pensioners on the charity of others. No mortal could ever plead an exemption from any *one* calamity incident to humanity; and he that cannot escape *one*, it is possible he might experience *all*. Be ready, always ready, ye sons of discretion! to distribute—*be wholly given to hospitality.*

Additional motives to universal charity, are derived from the intention of Divine Providence.—God is the author of all

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our blessings, and *the giver of every good and every perfect gift*; and surely those are none of the least of the divine favours that enable us to act immediately in his stead, and deal out the bounties of his providence to mankind?—Every endowment of this world's good, is a loud call to beneficence. The moral world is so governed by God, that the scheme of his providence includes the most forcible motives to those virtues which are best fitted to complete our characters. He who enjoys the blessings of heaven, and does not communicate them to his fellow-creatures, stops the favours of heaven in their appointed course; he appropriates a treasure, which he ought to have benevolently dispersed.—But the man of charity, co-operates with divine benignity; and carries on the gracious purposes of infinite wisdom: he enjoys peace and tranquillity here, and will be amply rewarded at the resurrection of the just.

But there are other considerations to induce us to charity, which having their weight in all other affairs, we should reasonably suppose will be prevalent in the present case: those drawn from our own interest. — The most probable method of conciliating the regards of others, is to exhibit a proper behaviour towards them. Charity in all its diffusive branches, whose benign influences cherish and foster every virtue, nay the very root from whence all social excellence, however diversely named, arises, is, in its own nature, fitted to call forth approbation and love. It is always contemplated with a disposition of mind more favourable than any other to a retaliation of kindness, or a free disinterested performance of it. — When charity is once set forth with a gift, it is but seldom it returns without a reward. — A good office performed in that nice instant of time, which charity always discovers, happily accommodated to particular circumstances,

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not oppressively intruding upon the beneficiary, but exactly suited to the present secret hope of his breast, has oftentimes been requited with abundant interest. — In this case, the bounty is estimated by these favourable occasions, these exact opportunities, and the urgent wants and distresses relieved; and if it light upon an ingenuous soul, the requital will be proportioned to such an estimation.

But suppose there should be no actual return of benefits — that a man's coffers should not be evidently fuller, because the hand of liberality hath been *open as day with melting charity*? that man hath found his boon with tenfold interest, who sees it either in the hand of the orphan, or in the chearful countenance of the widow. He finds it here with the blessing of heaven upon it. In the effects of his charity, he sees his prayers, and the benevolent ends of God's gracious providence answered; and this is a satisfaction which

the sensualist never felt.—This is, in allusion to the figurative expression of the text, as if we were to cast a tribute into a river, whose water had the property of converting it to gold—nay, it is more, it is giving a power to earthly treasure to purchase divine satisfaction.—It is the effectual means of making our worldly riches, *a treasure that waxeth not old, eternal in the heavens.*

This amiable excellence, charity, with all those benevolent affections of soul, which it manifestly includes, which lead us to participate and relieve the pains, anxieties, and distresses of our fellow-creatures, of what nature soever they may be, make an essential preparation for our future happiness. The state of the blessed above is always represented as a state of harmony, and peace, where no uneasy passions shall exert themselves; where all shall be agreement, harmony and love; where the same desires shall

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large, the same objects satisfy, the same happiness delight, the same joys abound. Whoever then carrieth not with him the amiable, exalting, god-like spirit of charity, can plead no title to the heavenly blessedness. The saints of God, and angels of heaven, reap their felicity from this divine temper in its full perfection.

How wise is God in the constitution of his government, and our nature, who has so appointed, that those virtues which best promote the designs of his goodness, and our happiness in this world, shall be the essential preparation for the happiness of the immortal state?

This divine spirit of charity it is that lessens the number of calamities. It is this that softens the heart, and humanizes the soul; without which, the world would be one uniform picture of deformity, and human life an undistinguished scene of confusion. — It is the grand link of society,

and the chief corner stone in the sublime edifice of public happiness. It wears a different aspect, 'tis true, agreeable to the object to which it more immediately relates; but its nature ever remains invariably the same.

—It warms the paternal, and animates the filial breast.—It glows with generous friendship and esteem, and melts with kind compassion and forgiveness.—It raises us from ourselves, and leads into another's condition, and makes us partakers of their distress.—It teaches us the wise improvement of all our possessions, faculties, and talents.—It makes human life tolerable.—

Without the observation of this benevolent disposition in others, and the sensation of it in our own hearts, a wise man would wish to quit this scene of being, and, at all adventures, run the risque of exploring some happier region.—But, with divine philanthropy, let us not repine at human calamities, and the troubles which mortal flesh is heir to; for by this we can make every thing easy and agreeable; soften

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others cares, and lighten our own burden.
 Let us more and more practise this virtue in
 all its diffusive parts, since it is the parent
 stock of all those charities, and amiable
 excellencies, which most adorn and exalt
 our characters.

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S E R M O N VI.

Of Conscience.

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S E R M O N VI.

Of Conscience.

2 COR. i. 12.

*For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our
conscience.*

WHEN the omnipotent and wise Creator of all worlds, formed this system, he ordained certain laws by which all should be regularly governed and upheld. In the natural world these are so invariable, that men have been led into the most nice and accurate discoveries founded upon principles, which were of allowed authority, from the concurrent experience of many ages. These laws, have never been suspended or controuled, but in cases where the same almighty power was as evident in the suspension or controul, as in their first appointment. The brute creatures have laws by which

they are invariably governed : the propensities of their natures, as well as diversification of their species, universally obtain. — Thus high in the scale of being, there is no law transgressed, no order violated, or any confusion introduced. — Man likewise is subject to a variety of laws — his animal nature partaking with that of inferior creatures, with respect to this part of his frame, he is akin to them. — But there is a nobler part in the composition of man, *The spirit of God has given him understanding that makes him wiser than the beast of the field and the fowls of the air, and but a little lower than the angels of heaven.* — The powers and capacities of his mind enable man to investigate the perfections of God, to trace the proceedings of his providence, and method of his moral administration. These powers of the human mind may be considered as so many laws of our intellectual nature ; yet they differ very widely from the other laws of our constitution — they do not all necessarily obtain

in an equal degree ; nor are they left to their own impulse without any other direction — they require a subordination ; a certain rule to determine their power, and moderate their influence. There are some, such as the social and selfish affections, that appear opposite in their very nature, and contrary in their tendency. — It is necessary, therefore, in this case, that there should be one supreme unalterable law, to which all the rest should be referred, in order to adjust their measure, and define their extent ; and to give to each its due weight and influence, with an authority from whence there shall be no appeal, and which shall govern in our breast with an absolute jurisdiction. — Such an authority does exist — such a law does obtain. — It is deeply engraven upon every heart. — It presides in every breast : and this law, can be no other than the law of heaven. — Its dictates, no other than the rule of rectitude. — Its approving sentence, the only foundation of happiness ; and its

condemning one, the greatest pain we can possibly endure. This is what we shall particularly prove in the following discourse.

Whenever men transgress the bounds of duty, and deviate from the path of virtue, they feel checks and remonstrances within, which no other principle can either silence or controul. Indeed, by repeated acts of iniquity the powers of virtuous principles proportionably lose their force; and the bias of the mind is now turned on the side of habitual evil. This remonstrating principle, which we generally stile CONSCIENCE, either does not recriminate so loud, or the ear of moral perception is not so sensible of its voice: so that men, by a bold perseverance in opposition to their consciences, may at length gain some victory over them, and then vainly imagine, that this genuine feeling, and abhorrence of sin, the apprehension and pain that attend the practice of it, are principles

founded in fear and vain imagination, which unnecessarily torture and distract mankind, abridge them of their liberty and enjoyments, which, however licentious, they think themselves entitled to partake of without restraint.

But suppose mankind capable of arriving at such a dreadful deception; suppose it possible for them to gain this victory over their consciences; it no more proves that the original dictates of conscience were false, than an accidental malady of the body, proves there is no such thing as a genuine state of health.

Much time and laborious endeavour are necessary to introduce these moral evils; and men never come to think the restraints of conscience are to be broken through, without a violation of duty, till under the infatuating delusions of sin, which always cloud the mind with ignorance, darken it with error, and perplex

it with uncertainty—while in the mad career of iniquity men are hurried on with an impetuosity that leaves reason and reflection far behind, they may forget, at least not very sensibly feel, the workings of their own minds; and being under a necessity of stifling their convictions, it is always their interest to be deaf to their consciences.—But when some accident happens to cut short their designs, to baffle their schemes, and frustrate their bad intentions—when calamity overtakes them like a whirlwind, or disease, the harbinger of death, arrests the jocund spirits, and damps the ardor of their hope—then, with impetuous recoil, the man falls back upon himself—and strives, but strives in vain, to shake off the load of sorrow.—Then, conscience gaining strength like an enemy after repose, rises all in arms unexpectedly against him—then the sting of remorse pains with tenfold acuteness: every aggravated crime rises full to his view—and conscience, that was vainly thought

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to have been laid eternally asleep, awakens, and raises apprehensions, to which eternity gives more awful horror.—This is sufficient to establish the authority of conscience.

Should it be here enquired, if the authority of conscience be of this sacred and awful nature, why are not its dictates invariable and certain restraints upon the human mind?—And why should mankind differ in their opinions of the degree of moral guilt; and if at any time a man commits sin without breaking through the restraints of his conscience, (however such a state be introduced) why should that part of his conduct be chargeable with guilt, since every degree of it supposes a violation of conscience? To this I answer, that no one case can be supposed, in which the natural and unadulterated decisions of conscience will not invariably determine upon the guilt itself; and as to the exact degree

of moral turpitude it contains, reason will decide this after circumstances are known, and properly attended to.—Conscience is not that power of the mind that nicely judges upon the various circumstances and relations of actions, its sentence is general, and hath respect to the action simply considered in itself.—As to the other part of the enquiry; unless it can be shewn that men at *first* practise iniquity without the least remorse of their consciences, the objection to the authority of this principle, vanishes.—For if they do arrive at that hardness of heart, that they have but few, if any restraints to break through, when they violate their duty, yet, considering what prevarications with themselves, what base deceits they must have passed upon their own hearts, and with what wilful blindness they have rushed forward into vice, before they could have arrived to this state of insensibility, they are every way as culpable, as if at present

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they sinned against the loudest remonstrances their consciences could utter.

These things being premised upon the nature and authority of conscience, we shall now enquire into that state of it which is described in our text as conducive to our happiness. *Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience.*

There are these requisites to true happiness ; we must be able to look within with composure, around us with equanimity, backward with pleasure, and forward with hope. — If the affections of the mind are not in proper order, in vain do we expect felicity. — This divine harmony of soul alone draws down the angel of peace to make the human heart its residence. Before we can look around us with equanimity, pride must be subdued, malévolence and every species of envy destroyed, and the divine spirit of charity must breathe its influences upon

the mind, and excite to that benevolence and love of mankind, which leading us devoutly to wish them every good, leaves us under no fear of receiving from them any evil. Present peace arises from pleasing remembrance.—If we can recollect nothing but guilt—if a review of our past conduct afford no other prospect but the mercies of heaven slighted and abused, and its laws violated, where shall we fly to gain one moment's ease?—But if the past delight, both the present and future shall please. If the present day is to be enjoyed, what can afford rational happiness without alloy, but such an expectation of the morrow, that carries with it no perturbation or fear?—If all our conduct must be scrutinized by the eye of perfect holiness and rectitude; what can please or delight, if we cannot look up to the awarding Deity with some well-grounded hope of his favour and approbation? If in any respect *our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all*

things; but if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.—It is not more certain that these are the essentials of true happiness, than that these are included in an approving conscience.

If we regard the administration of God's moral government with a becoming veneration; if we revere all the divine perfections with a proper awe; if we observe all the commandments of God with a religious fear, *we have then his spirit witnessing with our spirits that we are his offspring*; and then we may be assured, that all events will concur in effectually promoting our best interests.—This will alleviate every pain, and subdue the strength of every sorrow; it will prove our consolation under every trial of life; make easy the descent of the valley and shadow of death, and be the foundation of eternal felicity.

In like manner, the approbation of our own consciences upon the discharge of those duties we owe our fellow-creatures, is another source of lasting satisfaction. The very thought of deserving well of mankind, is the best foundation of moral virtue and social benevolence, as well as our only support when we are ill treated; for the best consolation under any affliction, is this, that the calamity was not occasioned by any wilful transgression of our own—besides, there is such a superiority of character in the man who is unjustly treated, if he bear it with becoming composure, as suits well with the generous and laudable ambition of the soul—and this will lead to a tender pity of those whose attainments in virtue are inferior, and whose vices give occasion for his virtues to exert themselves. By this means the nearest resemblance of the divine character is formed, and consequently our happiness and perfection enhanced.

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But the testimony of conscience reaches still farther — the virtues and duties which respect ourselves, come immediately under its cognizance.

Man is called to give an account to himself, and before the delegate of heaven he often stands charged — when thus summoned to appear before ourselves, none but our own hearts can hear the charge, and nothing but our own integrity and innocence plead in our behalf. — Happy! thrice happy! that man, who can enter this court of supreme judicature undismayed — who can answer before the bar of his own conscience with fidelity; hear the important cause without prejudice, plead without artifice or mean evasion, be acquitted with honor, and dismissed for the time with applause. — There are seasons, which it were of infinite importance, to allot to this grand business. — We ought to enter into a voluntary trial of ourselves, and be adjudged by that supreme law of

our nature, which stands engraven by the finger of God upon the human heart— We should deliver ourselves up upon the commission of every fault, plead guilty without any disguise, own our crimes with an ingenuous shame, and pay the penalty annexed to the offence, compunction of soul, and give some security that we offend no more, by a devout determination to reform our conduct.—This justice and fair dealing are as due to ourselves, and as essential to our own private happiness, as that species of justice and integrity due to mankind, is essential to public felicity.—It will enable us to keep a fair and impartial account with our own hearts—to detect any fraudulent proceedings—to determine what advances we make in virtue—and consequently be a rule, even to determine the state of our best interests—and what is of still higher importance, habitually prepare us for the grand solemnities of that awful day of general judgment, when conscience shall

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consign us over to the trial before the judge of the whole world, and assembled angels : when it shall serve no longer as an advocate or friend, but only appear as an impartial witness—then indeed if the records of conscience prove a testimony of obedience, our happiness is sure ; the joyful sentence will be pronounced, *Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

If these considerations be not sufficient to prove the truth of our doctrine in favour of the authority of conscience ; let us enter into an impartial description of characters, by way of mutual illustration.

First, we will begin with the character of that man who has the testimony of conscience on his side.

He is self possess'd, and happy, being satisfied with himself.—He need not seek abroad for enjoyment, who always carries consolation in his own breast.—The aspect of nature, to such a one, wears a perpetual smile.—Internal composure not only enables us to view every thing in a light most favourable to its affording us a pleasing satisfaction; but it deprives every thing external of the power to molest us.—See the man, who thus perpetually bears within him the source of happiness, his demeanour is not arrogantly assuming, but sedately grave.—To inferiors he is condescending, to superiors decently submissive, to equals, affable and improving.—Whatever satisfactions of this world he enjoys, he possesses them with such a degree of indifference, as shall make their deprivation, no material diminution of his happiness.—Such a man, is frugal in his pleasures, yet he tastes them with a relish peculiar to himself.—In calamity and distress he is properly affected; yet no

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dejected ; and when trouble falls upon him unawares, it finds him upon his guard, nor shakes the inward tranquillity of his soul—all his affections being proportioned to the worth of their objects, keep his mind in an equipoise of stability, and fit him for the encounter of every trouble, and make him superior to the attacks of misfortune.—Follow this man through the circle of his duty—see him fervent in prayer, and full of gratitude at every opening day—see each day adding fresh pleasure to his duty, and his duty fixing his hope and fortitude more firm.—Behold ! with what resignation, he commits himself, and all his concerns, to heaven—see him in the enjoyment of the present, unpained by the remembrance of the past, or anticipation of futurity.—What a serenity attends him to his evening repose, as if the angel of divine consolation whispered the word of heavenly peace to his attentive soul—see him at the hour of darkness, steadfast and unalarmed as in the

brightness of noon.—A good conscience is the perpetual unclouded sun-shine of the human soul.—Follow him still onward in the path of life, and view him just about to pass the extreme limits of mortality—see him brought low with sickness and pain, without one murmur or complaint.—And though to him are dear all the tender ties of nature and friendship, he bears the rending of these asunder, even those wound closest to his heart, with composure and resignation—and thus performs the hardest task that nature can undergo, and wherein the God of nature surely pities us, with a dignity of character, which, at such a season, nothing but virtue can inspire.—Perhaps, in this moment, you will see the tear of tenderness drop from the dying eye; but this is only the last tribute he pays to the officious hand of trembling affection; it flows in sympathy with others distress—his brow is still serene—the soul rises not up tumultuous in dread suspense, and paints its

confused emotions in the eager vacant stare of wild surprise.—Composed, it softens the harsh lines with which death deforms the face, and breaks them into smiles of complacential resignation.

I am now to draw a very different character, of the man whose conscience witnesseth against him.

Why is he alarmed at that instant peal of thunder that shook the vaulted heaven? It brake not upon his devoted head!—His conscience thunders louder than the storm, and the darkness of his own mind throws a veil over the bright face of the living day.—He felt omnipotence in that voice of thunder; and knew if it were exercised upon himself, to what a dismal end. He trusts not a friend, suspecting each one to be his enemy—all nature he apprehends is in arms against him, because he is not in charity with all mankind—

he starts from his bed, where the balm of sleep has been shaken from his pillow by the terror of dreams.—He rushes into the world to forget himself, and every sacred duty.—Here, his fears take possession of him upon every new occurrence; and his heart ever beats with emotions unfriendly to every softer passion, and complacent feeling.—See him impatient under every calamity, and upon the least apprehension of death dreadfully alarmed: then the presence of a virtuous friend distracts him—each solicitous hope eagerly and impatiently demands some effectual remedy to the disease—the past will not bear the reflection—the present is hardly endured—the future dreaded and shunned—to which, the immediate state of pain is preferred.—With eyes aghast, hands trembling, and brow whereon horror sits in dreadful suspense, hear him, in the language of the poet, solicit ineffectual aid.

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Can'st thou not minister to minds diseas'd,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Rase out the written troubles of the brain;
And with some sweet oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the soul bosom of that perilous stuff,
That weighs upon the heart?

Vain the request—death arrests the vital
breath—that pang and groan commit
him to his fate.—To avoid which dread
condition, and this deplorable end, *Let us
keep consciences void of offence, both towards
God and man.*

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S E R M O N VII.

The story of Naaman the leper.



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S E R M O N VII.

The story of Naaman the leper.

2 KINGS v. 13.

And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said—My father! if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it?—how much rather then when he saith to thee, wash and be clean?

THIS address makes part of a remarkable story recorded in the ancient Scripture history.—The circumstances of which were as follow.

Naaman was general under the king of Syria, whom, for his victorious deeds, and wise counsels, the king delighted to honor. But the favour of his prince, and the dig-

nitie he sustained, could not secure him from a loathsome disease, the leprosy. A servant that attended Naaman's wife, observed her master's disorder; and perhaps upon hearing either that the malady increased, or that no effectual remedy could be procured, she ventures thus to address her mistress.—*Would God! my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria; for he would recover him of his leprosy.*

This request was related to the king, who, willing to relieve so able and experienced a general from every calamity, dispatches a letter to the king of Israel, with the usual forms of royal munificence, when friendship was intended, such as gifts of silver and gold, and change of raiment; beseeching him, that he would, by a proper recommendation to the prophet, be the means of Naaman's recovery.—The king of Israel, finding no mention expressly made of the prophet's name, but only an immediate application to himself,

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with a becoming humility answered, *Am I a God, to kill, and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me?* Such a demand can only be designed to extort a refusal, to furnish a pretended cause of other oppressions, —

But the prophet soon understood the message and request, and solicits the king that Naaman might be sent unto him. Accordingly Naaman goes to Elisha, who orders him by a messenger, to wash in Jordan seven times, assuring him, that, in consequence of this, his leprosy should be cured. —

But Naaman, so far from confiding in this simple means as the proper method of effecting his cure, was angry, and departed; expecting that the prophet would have come forth to meet him with a respect due to his character and station; and with some ceremonious invocation upon his God: and to have healed him with

only a touch of his hand.—If washing in a river be the only method of recovery, are not Abana, and Paphar, rivers of Damascus, better than this scanty river, or all the waters of Israel? — Might not the ablution there be of sovereign efficacy? — Prophet! thy advice I despise — and he turned in a rage. — But upon the remonstrance of his attendants, *My father! if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, wash and be clean?* he follows the prophet's direction, and did dip himself seven times in Jordan! and behold! he was made clean. — Struck with the power by which the cure was effected, he returns with gratitude to Elisha, and acknowledges the God of Israel.

In this history, we have a striking instance of that weakness of the human mind, which, in all ages of the world, hath led mankind to expect some very

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extraordinary means of deliverance, when the evil to be removed, was of an unusual nature.—Thus we find that scarcely any bodily complaint exists, that has not some sovereign remedy prescribed for its cure, quite foreign from all those means of recovery, which God from his goodness has kindly afforded, and enabled the wisdom of man to discover. These imaginary methods of cure have laid the foundation for the most unphilosophical notions conceivable. They have led mankind to attribute miraculous and mysterious virtues and powers to things intirely indifferent in themselves. They have produced opinions destructive of truth, and subversive of those principles, upon which the providence of God is established. By the strong possession they have taken of the human mind, they have so far influenced the imagination, that in consequence of them, perhaps, some bodily cures have been effected. To nothing else but this, are many of the boasted mi-

acles in the church of Rome to be ascribed.

But these extravagant expectations are not confined alone to the superstitious hope of having bodily disorders removed, and inveterate diseases eradicated by such extraordinary and unusual means; but men have extended them into religious concerns: they have rather chosen to have recourse to things mysterious, and unintelligible, that raise the imagination, and excite an ill-grounded hope, than to the plain and easy methods of moral and religious instruction. To nothing besides this strange disposition, can you attribute the substitution of rites and ceremonies for moral observances. Hence take their rise the doctrines of vicarious sufferings, and the imputation of another's righteousness. From this origin, you might deduce the reasons why positive institutions have been so misunderstood, misapplied and abused; and, contrary to their very appointment,

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and original design, supposed to contain some mysterious power, which, (independent of the principles of holiness, they were intended to support) shall make the observer of them, the peculiar favourite of heaven.

The divine author of our holy religion knew what was in man. And though he himself experienced none of the sinful imperfections of human nature, yet he was perfectly acquainted with all the moral corruptions to which men were liable. He has therefore with admirable wisdom, and in gracious condescension to our imperfections, appointed two plain ordinances, or positive institutions, less liable than any other to abuse, or mistake : inferring from the tendency of the human mind to superstition, that if ever mankind did introduce into his religion, human institutions, and give them the sanction of his authority, that endless errors would ensue, and his pure and holy religion degene-

rate into mere ceremony and form. His appointment of two, and only two institutions in the Christian church, is the best security imaginable against any abuses of this nature: for now, there can be no reasonable pretence for men to introduce any other than the divine author of our religion hath already appointed. — And yet this has not kept his pure religion clear of the most trifling ceremonies, ostentatious parades, and ridiculous fopperies, that any religion was ever loaded and embarrassed withal; which obtain in the Romish church. And although, among us of the Reformed churches, no such corruptions, and external abuses of the institutions of our great master appear, yet there is some danger of an undue internal reliance upon them. — From the sense, and apprehension of having offended an omnipotent and pure being, men have been too frequently led to have recourse to somewhat else to appease the anger, and conciliate the favour, and propitiate the majesty of heaven;

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than personal holiness, and reformation of conduct. — This, together with the false notions of Deity they entertained, appear to be the natural origin of those rites and ceremonies, which prevailed among the heathens, before Christianity enlightened the world.

If ever men separate the idea of moral improvement from that of a positive institution, there is great danger that they will stop in the observance of this, as if it were the end, and not the obvious means of religious improvement.

BAPTISM should only be considered as a submission to that authority, and the profession of that religion, which we acknowledge divine. This ordinance is of no farther use, than as it serves to remind us of our obligations, and strengthen the motives to duty, by the promises we make, and the resolutions we form, when we become members of the Christian church.

The celebration of the LORD'S SUPPER, ought to be attended upon with the same views; and is by no means to be esteemed a compliance with the commands of Christ that will be of any avail, if it does not lead us to practise those virtues, and obey that religion which Christ taught; the divine authority of which, his sufferings, death, and resurrection, were signal confirmations.

In exact proportion as men have ceremoniously observed external rites, have they neglected internal righteousness. — How many mistaken mortals tread with unwearied ardor the unbeaten tract of a laborious pilgrimage, only to pay their adoration to a shrine, where a saint was either supposed to have lived, or died; and returning through numberless difficulties, think heaven well pleased with their voluntary submission to such unnecessary toils; and that a good God delights in the anguish of a poor deluded creature? and

all this shall be done, without one irregular passion subdued ; without a spark being added to the flame of charity ; and without any better internal disposition for righteousness.

How many satisfy themselves with their mere attendance upon the public offices of devotion ; and think their appearance in the house of God, sufficient to recommend them to the divine acceptance? — when perhaps the world, and all its cares, have so far engaged their minds, that they have felt greater devotion to these, than they have towards God, whom they solemnly profess to adore.

It must be confessed indeed, that the constant attendance upon any formal parts of devotion, has a tendency to make us so familiar with them, as may produce a kind of negligent disregard : but I will take upon me to say, that if we brought

minds properly disposed to the offices of public service, there would be always something sufficient to employ all our attention, and prevent any abuse arising from familiarity with them. If this familiarity be properly formed, divine subjects, and their contemplation, would afford the most pleasing satisfaction to the mind; and when things have gained our whole affections, it is but seldom we think it a disagreeable employment to be immediately engaged with them.

The ordinary means of religion are best suited to our improvement; and would be but ill exchanged for rites and ceremonies. As to the external means of religion, which we engage in when we publicly assemble together to present our joint adorations, and petitions to the supreme Being, to acknowledge his perfections, and providential care; our dependence, necessities and wants; who sees not, that this is the most rational method of

begetting in our minds a proper reverence of the divine being, and of exciting that gratitude in our breasts, which shall prove the genuine principle of obedience?

Our public petitions presented before the throne of the divine Majesty, in behalf of others, naturally tend to excite that benevolence and charity, which are the very foundation of all private and public happiness. Having our duty explained and enforced, our obligations to it stated and proved, our hopes, and fears addressed by all the awful threatnings, and all the gracious promises of God; appear to be means of religious improvement, superior to which, none other can be devised.

These usual means of instruction are absolutely necessary for the first information of the mind in religion, and morality; which, when properly considered, and their nature understood, will

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appear consistent in themselves, carrying with them sufficient proof of their importance and excellence, and will be seen to contain a stability equal to their own support. When thus informed, we shall see the inseparable connections of each duty, and virtue; what mutual support they lend each other—that none are detached from the rest in principle, or ought, or consistently can be separated in practice—that all, by a most amazing harmony, are so united, that they form a noble structure, fitly joined in all its parts, whose builder is God.—In exact correspondence to these ideas of the complete system of religion and virtue, are the express exhortations of the Gospel.—*We are to be perfect in every good word and work—we are to add to our faith fortitude, knowledge, temperance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity.—All virtues and graces are to be in us, and abounding; so that we be neither barren nor fruitless.* We are so to nourish all the seeds

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of religion and virtue in our minds, that they may produce the genuine and effectual *fruits of righteousness, to the praise and glory of God.*

Mankind, in general, have not only the sin that easily besets them, but the virtue they can most easily practise.—The excellence of this they are wont to exalt, to make its observance of greater merit, and consequently of more weight, when cast into the scale to ballance against their omissions and faults.

Notwithstanding religion and virtue have ever the dictates of reason on their side, yet we shall be much mistaken, if we think that men can never pass a cheat upon themselves with respect to these.—There is scarcely a man living, who has not either secretly thought, or openly declared, that if his situation in life were to be changed, he should practise such and such virtues immediately resulting there-

from, which those persons are entirely defective in, who fill those stations of life.— And who is there that has not lived to remark, that when such changes of circumstances have taken place, the man's opinions and practice may be placed in direct opposition to each other?

There is in the human breast a kind of secret petitioning heaven in our own behalf, and requesting its peculiar favours, as talents, which we should thankfully receive and improve, not so much for our own, as for the sake of others.— This conditional method of prayer, suits very well with persons of a certain complexion, who pretend, that such is their benevolence, that all their desires of larger possessions are founded alone in that pity which they feel for others distress: but if heaven in its bounty—or rather judgment—has answered the request, the poor mortal has done little more than hid his talent in a napkin.—The widow hath still

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mourned, the orphan been hungry, the poor unrelieved, so far as his bounty was concerned.

Others there are who take a partial view of their duty—they are perpetually contemplating superior virtues, and attend not to those less ties of social happiness, which, in numberless cases, are of the first importance—they are like persons who looking upon the distant ocean, consider what great and extensive benefits it is the means of conveying to mankind, while they lose sight of all those smaller streams that silently water each fertile field, and thus afford nourishment essential to our comfort and happiness.—There are who will exalt fortitude, honor, dignity of character, and the like, who never properly attend to submission, patience, humility, forbearance, and kindness.—We should judge of things by their intrinsic worth, and the good they are capable of producing.—Virtue is not to be meted by

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magnitude, nor estimated by a sound.—
HUMILITY is as great, and sounds as well
to the ear of moral perception, as—MAG-
NANIMITY.

Persons of such a cast as this, who admire nothing but what appears the sublime of virtue, are for ever dwelling upon the importance of those virtues, which their very situation prevents them from practising; or else pleading their inability to perform those duties immediately resulting from their stations, with that dignity, and in that extent, which they desire to do, and would really perform, were their sphere but a little enlarged, and their capacities encreased.

You will hear such as these pretend a great zeal for the cause of religion in general; and plead wisely in favour of it; support its doctrines with great warmth of argument, so that you would imagine that any difficulties encountered in behalf of it,

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would willingly be endured ; that nothing was wanting to shew with what steady fortitude they would sustain the attack of persecution itself, but racks and tortures ; when at the same time, as far as they are really engaged, they want that sedateness, and inflexible adherence to the means of religion, which can be its only support.—The man that would suffer most in the cause of religion, is he, that doth most for his real interest, before he is called to be a martyr in the cause.

If penances and pilgrimages, say others, were to be the sign of my sincerity in religion, all the ease in which I now so happily repose, I would willingly resign.—I would be all vigor and activity, all toil and perseverance, if, by the order of heaven, I should be called to such trials.—Mistaken mortal ! keep the pilgrimage at home—perform the penance upon thy soul—to what end shall thy body be afflicted?—Deny the irregular passions of thy breast—

subdue pride—tear up envy by the roots—stifle resentment in the very birth—stop the torrent of anger ere it break down all the fences of humanity:—If pilgrimages delight, and difficulties thou wouldst undergo, travel far into thyself—traverse again, and again, the barren ground of thy uncultivated mind—give not thine eyes to rest, nor thy body to repose, till thou hast subdued the irregular affections of thy soul, and made some advances in the road of virtue.

Some you may find, who seem to acknowledge charity as the most excellent of all graces: but they generally very unfortunately pitch upon objects, the relief of whom exceeds their capacity; they chuse collective evils; they lay together many calamities, and then devoutly wish their possessions equal to their generous intentions.—The best advice that can be given to persons who entertain such comprehensive notions of their duty, is—shew

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your readiness to relieve all, were it in your power, by administering to the wants of those, whom you are able to supply. — And if you have not, like your benevolent Saviour, the miraculous power to feed five thousand; or if your worldly substance will not allow of such enlarged beneficence; you have the most gracious promise of the Redeemer, which to a benevolent mind must afford the truest satisfaction, since this disposition alone is possession sufficient to obtain his blessing—*that if a cup of cold water*, be administered with that perfect charity, that characterizes his disciples, it should be rewarded as if the favour had been conferred upon himself.

From the general doctrine laid down and enforced in this discourse, we see the necessity of attending to the proper means of virtue and religion; and the dangerous tendency of substituting rites and ceremonies, or any thing else, in the

room of true religion : and the vanity of expecting that great and signal deliverances will be wrought for us, which the providence of God neither vindicates nor supports.—Let us look upon every means of religious improvement, as of considerable importance ; and esteem nothing little, or mean, that has the least tendency to make us wiser and better.—Let us fear the dangerous error of thinking that we are discharged from the obligations to any virtue, because we cannot practise it in its fullest extent—nor let us decline the cause of religion, because our station in life gives not such a sanction to our character as shall recommend our example, be it what it may. A good man's virtues seldom are wholly concealed, and if obscurity should wrap them in its dark mantle, they will at the most important hour, stand all revealed, and be objects of the applause both of angels, and of God.

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S E R M O N VII. 177

Let us remember, that as on the one hand, nothing more will be expected than we can perform; that, on the other, a righteous and good God will demand an account of the talents entrusted to our care—may we be grateful to that goodness of the supreme Being, who has prescribed such rules for our obedience, with which not only our happiness, but the happiness of others, is immediately connected—nor let us suppose any other means more conducive to this gracious end, than those which God in his wisdom has appointed in the revelation of his will.—With respect to every virtue and excellence our religion enjoins, may we remember this rule of the highest authority, *if ye know these things, happy are ye, if ye do them.*

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S E R M O N V I I I .

The keeper of the prison converted by
Paul and Silas.



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S E R M O N VIII.

The keeper of the prison converted by
Paul and Silas.

ACTS xvi. 33.

*And he took them the same hour of the night,
and washed their stripes; and was bap-
tized, he and all his straightway.*

W H E N the apostles and first teach-
ers of Christianity went forth to preach
its doctrines, and establish it in the world,
they needed supernatural assistances to
sustain them amidst all the difficulties
they were to encounter, and support them
under those severe trials they were called
to bear. Saint Paul was not a more
eminent convert to Christianity, than he
was a singular instance of what men have
suffered for the cause of religion: he had
trials of his faith, sufficient to prove,

that it was established upon an unshaken foundation; witness all those calamities he recounts, those hazards he ran, the persecutions he endured, and the fore trials through which he patiently went.

The apostles were scarcely well received in any city into which they entered: they had no reason indeed to expect this; for they taught a religion that opposed all the popular prejudices and received opinions; and espoused doctrines of such purity, as but very ill suited with the corrupt passions and practices of those whom they meant to reform.—Not only the religion they taught, thus exposed them to scorn and contempt, but by the express declaration of their divine Master, they had little else to expect, but mocking, and cruel scourgings, bonds and imprisonment.—They soon experienced, by their own trials, that Jesus was a prophet indeed; for they were either called by the Holy Ghost, or else

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persecuted from city to city : so that they had but small respite from their arduous labours, and but few remissions from their glorious, though hazardous toils.—What treatment Paul and Silas met with as they travelled through Phrygia, and the region of Galatia, Mysia, Bythinia, Troas, Samothracia, and Neapolis, before they arrived at Phillippi, the chief city of Macedonia, whither the Holy Ghost directed them, we have no particular account : but what difficulties they here found are enumerated—what kind reception from some, and what severe treatment from others, we have described.—They were well received, and hospitably entertained by a certain woman, whose name was Lydia ; whom Paul had converted and baptized.—During the time of their devotion, it is recorded, that a damsel possessed with a spirit of divination, no sooner had join'd the multitude, but she cried, *these men are servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.* This she

continued to do many days — at length, Paul moved with holy zeal and pious concern, *in the name of Jesus, commanded the spirit to depart from her — and he obeyed the apostle that same hour.* Her masters, who made much gain by her soothsaying, seeing all prospect of their future emoluments gone, seized the apostle, and Silas, and brought them before the rulers and magistrates, accusing them of an open violation of the order of society, and teaching customs unlawful to be received and observed by them as Romans. Upon this artful representation of the case, the rage of the multitude, and anger of the rulers, were excited : they first cruelly scourge Paul and Silas, then commit them to prison, with a strict charge to the jailer of closest confinement ; who thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. — The apostle and Silas, unterrified by such oppressive and unjust treatment, remit not those duties, which they thought incum-

bent on them to perform — they prayed, and sang praises to God. — The Omnipotent in whom they trusted, and whose assistance they implored, answered their prayers by a most astonishing instance of the divine power which was to support, and deliver them — for behold! the foundations of the prison were suddenly shaken — the doors thrown open — and every one's bands loosed. — Awakened by omnipotent power, and seeing the doors miraculously opened, the keeper of the prison, reasonably concluding that the prisoners were fled, and that he should suffer from the hands of the magistrates for permitting them to escape, drew his sword, and was about to slay himself — when, to his great astonishment, Paul, with a loud voice, prevented his executing this rash design, by saying, “*do thyself no harm, for we are all here.*” To assure himself of the certainty of the report, the keeper of the prison called for a light, sprang in, and seeing that all was

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true, and that his prisoners remained, though unbound, trembling he threw himself at their feet, brought them forth from the inward gloomy recess; and under the various emotions, which such a combination of extraordinary circumstances could not but raise, he impatiently enquires, *Sirs! what must I do to be saved? — And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. — And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God, with all his house.*

This account is written with that genuine simplicity, that best recommends truth; which is the great characteristic of the evangelical history. — We will take it just as it stands recorded. — It affords

S E R M O N VIII. 187

ample room for observation, and religious improvement.

The first thing that presents itself to us, is, the sudden conversion of the jailer : No conversation appears to have past, before he threw himself at the feet of Paul and Silas, either to convince him of the truth of religion, or induce him to the practice of it. — There seems to have been no enquiry on his side, or information on theirs, till he asks, *what must I do to be saved?* — and they answer, *believe on the Lord Jesus, &c.* — Whether the keeper of the prison attended with the assembly of the people to those things which the apostle delivered, previous to his commitment, from the history doth not appear ; and therefore, it will not be proper to draw any particular conclusion from such a conjectural event. — He had other proofs of their character, and as strong evidences of their innocence, and that power by which they professed themselves au-

thorized to teach, as if he had been a witness of all that had passed previous to their imprisonment.

Here are men committed to his custody, with strict charge of the most diligent watch over them, who are accused of violating the public tranquillity; and teaching doctrines which were unlawful to be received or observed.—We have no reason to suppose this man an exception to the general remark, that men receive their impressions and notions of religion from popular prejudices; and embrace that system generally received and established in the country where they are educated.—It is not to be wondered at then, that he should, in the present case, easily fall in with the general opinion of his prisoners great offence; and consequently he would readily obey the orders he had received, and punctually execute the sentence of punishment denounced against them.—Free therefore from all

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apprehension either of the innocence of his prisoners, or their unjust accusation and confinement, with his own hand he fastens them in bonds, to all human probability, beyond the possibility of release or escape, and retires to his repose—when suddenly the prison was violently shaken by an earthquake—the doors miraculously thrown open—every one's bands loosed, and the prisoners not attempting to escape.—Upon such unusual and astonishing circumstances, falling out at the same period of time, the mind of the jailer must have been amazingly terrified and alarmed. Amidst the various thoughts that in an instant took possession of his soul, may we not suppose the following, naturally to have arisen.—“ Are these the men who are charged with imposture and sedition, who, after the injurious treatment they have received from my hands, have benevolently prevented the violence I was about to offer to myself, or the punishment I might have received

from others, had they taken the opportunity, that heaven itself has presented for their escape?—remain they my prisoners still, though the hand of God has unbound their fetters, loosed their bonds, and thrown open the prison doors?—If impostors, would they not have readily embraced, if not premeditated, an opportunity of escape?—What! continue they still in custody, though, from the hard and unjust usage they have already found, they have nothing to expect, but farther oppression, more ill treatment, longer confinement, and repeated stripes?—Surely these are men of some extraordinary character—they bear some high commission, who have the power of heaven exerted in their behalf—they have doubtless some grand scheme to execute, and some very important end to promote—and if they do propose salvation to the people, and teach doctrines not generally believed, or received; if they do lay claim to divine illumination, they seem every way quali-

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fied to make their cause and pretensions
 good. — They are certainly unjustly ac-
 cused of being disturbers of the peace of
 society, and happiness of mankind ; they
 suffer with unexampled fortitude the pu-
 nishment inflicted on them : and now,
 instead of attempting to revenge the
 indignities and contempt received from
 me, by the kindest interposition, they
 have saved that life, which otherwise I
 should have sacrificed through fear and de-
 spair — they are more than ordinary men
 — they are Gods. — If they choose not to
 take this opportunity of escaping, it is be-
 cause they have it in their power when-
 ever they please — men thus highly fa-
 voured and protected by heaven, are
 doubtless commissioned by God. — Right
 then is it for me to enquire of them the
 way of salvation they teach ; *and what I*
must do to be saved. — His mind, big with
 these thoughts, labouring under astonish-
 ment, fear, conviction and reverence,
 threw him at the feet of his prisoners : who,

upon his ardent request, inform him of the Gospel scheme of salvation, convert and baptize him. — It is obvious here to remark, that although some very strong impressions were made upon the mind of the jailer, yet these were not imprinted by any mysterious or supernatural influences: the extraordinary circumstances of the matter being such in themselves, as satisfactorily to account for them. And when any case will admit of this solution, we are not entitled to call in to our aid supernatural assistances.

Secondly, we may observe, that the genuine spirit of Christianity leads to benevolence and charity. — No sooner had this honest man received the first impressions of religion, but his soul caught its divine spirit. — Perhaps it will be here objected, “that the short time the apostle took in enforcing the doctrines of Christianity, was not sufficient to fix in his mind the extensive principles of true be-

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nevolence—but such an objection as this can never arise from the feeling heart: it is the cold remark of the speculative head. Know ye not that by the kind hand of divine benevolence, the human heart is formed capable of receiving the instantaneous impressions of charity—that but a kindred spark strike upon this tender fuel, the glowing flame of benevolence is at once enkindled? Charity can speak with such a sovereign, commanding, all-convicting voice, as in a moment to teach its universal sacred laws.—

Think you, that this convert wanted any other lesson than the living precepts he experienced in the behaviour of his prisoners?—He saw—he felt the God-like principles of benevolence—the human heart cannot stand against their influence. The keeper of the prison must assuredly gather, that this disposition of soul that Paul and Silas discovered for his safety here, and immortal happiness hereafter, was the very perfection of that religion

they taught : therefore, as a sincere convert, he at once put in practice the spirit of that religion, with which his mind had been newly enlightened—he felt his duty—important sensation!—had he been less affected, would he generously and kindly have endeavoured to heal those stripes which he himself had either given, or saw others inflict?—Go! ye false reasoners on human nature, and think it sufficient when ye have informed the head : we will say, upon the best evidence, that religion is nothing unless it sink into the heart—nor is it understood, until it be felt.

As to Christianity making this benevolent principle an indispensable duty and distinguishing characteristic ; this is evident from the whole of its promulgation and design.—First, in its highest perfection, in the Deity—next, in the express commands in this respect to imitate him ; and in the whole life of our Lord, his miracles and death, his pre-

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cepts and illustrations; and the declaration of what disposition those must be, who are to be finally rewarded at the judgment-day.

What are all the precepts to forgive injuries — to pardon our brethren — to love all mankind, to do them all the good in our power; to be just in our dealings; the father of the fatherless, the support of the widow, and the consolation of the distressed; but the great law of universal love and charity, diversified in all its modes, and variously described? In short, as benevolence is the chief means of answering the gracious designs of God; it must be the comprehensive precept enforced in that religion which comes immediately from him: and its being so peculiarly enjoined by the Christian law, is one very convincing internal evidence of the divine original, and authority of our holy religion.

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Thirdly—we have here, a remarkable instance of the real conviction of duty leading to a compliance with every thing it enjoins — *and he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his straightway.*—In general, it is not so much the reasonableness of duty that is in question, as the resolution to practise it. Many there are, who allow of the principles of obedience, and yet they cannot be prevailed with zealously to put these principles into practice: as if the cold, ineffectual consent of the judgment, could be substituted for those genuine feelings of the soul, that, in their proper exercise, invariably lead to the practice of virtue and religion. — If we once suffer the rising influences of devotion to subside, the flame of piety to grow languid, there will need much to excite and rekindle them. Where will be the security, if we neglect one part of our acknowledged duty, that we shall not in

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S E R M O N VIII. 197

time leave others unpractised? It is a sin of omission, to leave any thing undone, which we believe expressly enjoined. And it must be a very peculiar method of reasoning that those people use, who live in the entire neglect of what they themselves acknowledge to be their duty, when they attempt to vindicate or excuse themselves. It is very dangerous to indulge doubtful speculations on duty, after the mind has been once convinced. In this case, we generally deal very unfairly with ourselves, and as disingenuously with truth—we deceive ourselves into fatal mistakes, and then, vainly exult as if we had detected error.

Do we fear to comply with our duty because it is unreasonable?—If in any one case it appear so, it has been either misrepresented to, or misunderstood by us.—Is virtue, with those restraints it would lay upon our irregular desires, esteemed a burden? perhaps we have never exerted

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our whole strength : and we are not entitled to pass a decision, till we have made an impartial trial.

Virtue and religion are founded upon the immutable basis of truth ; and if we bring minds properly disposed to contemplate them, their excellence and importance will evidently appear — when our judgments are convinced, and our consciences on the side of our integrity, we are in the fair way of duty and happiness. And the best means of arriving either to the knowledge or practice of our duty, is, to treat our consciences with reverence, and obey the sacred dictates of reason without any reserve. — The opinions of others ought to weigh nothing against the virtuous approbation of our own minds. — The latter is an inestimable treasure, for the loss of which no other gain can compensate ; and the possession of which is beyond every other advantage : the former (however understood) is a matter,

in the estimation of reason, but of small importance ; because, independent of others judgment and opinions, a man may be completely happy in himself ; but if this source of enjoyment be ever obstructed, happiness cannot be derived from any other.

Fourthly ; we are taught by this part of the evangelical history—that a compliance with our duty, is always attended with self satisfaction and applause : *and when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.*

We readily admit, that the horror and despair of the wicked is the lowest depth of misery into which mankind can be plunged—the pang of conscience that the sinner feels, is generally allowed to be unutterable anguish : it is the worm of remorse that never dies, and the restless fire of torture that never can be

quenched ; and as surely as sin hath its unspeakable pains, religion hath its inef-
 fables pleasures. The latter raises men as
 high in the scale of enjoyment, as the
 former sinks them in degrees of misery.—
 Apply to iniquity all its anxieties, all its
 fears, terrors, remorse and punishment.
 virtue shall keep equal pace in its sedate
 felicity, well-grounded hope, peaceful
 composure, serene self-enjoyment, and
 glorious expectation of divine rewards.—
 Does vice depress, weaken, confound, dis-
 tract, alarm ? Virtue exalts, strengthens,
 calms, and cheers the soul.—As much as
 the sinner has to fear, so much the saint
 has to hope. If you attribute endless woe
 to the transgressor, remember the righteous
 shall have immortal rewards.

Every thing proves a source of happi-
 ness to the good man—he has God for
 his protector ; divine providence for his
 direction ; angels for his guard ; and the
 righteous for his companions.

S E R M O N VIII. 201

True enjoyment never yet was known to that man, who is not self-possessed—who has not the mastery over himself.— True felicity consists in the subordination of the inferior passions to the great law of reason, and the controul of conscience; and religion, prescribing the best rules for this regulation, and enforcing its precepts by proposals of happiness suited to the exalted and refined affections of the soul, must be the most sovereign means of promoting man's best and most durable happiness.— The mind must be ever in a state of delight, when it can look up to heaven with joyful hope; around with conscious integrity; and within with an approving testimony; and find there a conscience at rest, and an heart at peace.— How exalted must be those pleasures that give a foretaste of immortality, and the enjoyments of heaven? which the perfections of God himself—shall be exercised in encreasing; from whom, as the original source of all happiness, those permanent streams of fe-

licity are alone derived, which sweeten the cup of earthly portion with divine influences ; invigorating and supporting the soul ; and forming it more and more to a relish of these supreme enjoyments, that flow fast by the throne of the Eternal. — These satisfactions, these pleasures, and these delights, RELIGION ! are all thine own.

S E R M O N IX.

Acquaintance with God.



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S E R M O N IX.

Acquaintance with God.

JOB xxii. 21.

Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace.

THE great end of moral instruction, is to teach us to bear the troubles of life with fortitude, and composure. Religion, which makes us acquainted with the wise and benevolent intentions of divine providence, affords us the best supports under all our afflictions, by suggesting the consolations of God ; and promising the most durable happiness, as the reward of those virtues, which the evils of life call upon us to exert.

In whatever situation we are placed, it becomes us ever to consider, *that we are*

born to trouble ; that sooner, or later, the inheritance will be ours ; and so, by this wise expectation of calamity, fortify our minds against its sudden attacks.

It is the great business of religion to draw off our affections from this world—to break the force of its temptations—and make us less subject to be transported or alarmed by external objects ; or affected by those various changes to which all sublunary things are liable.—Religion would fix the mind upon such exalted permanent objects, as shall give it a like durable consistency : so that the soul, however at first affected by external circumstances, should soon be able to find in its own self consolation and support. This is the superiority religion would inspire—and this is formed by nothing so effectually, as the contemplation upon the perfections and providence of God ; and that full conviction, that must result from such contemplation of the wisdom and goodness

of his moral administration, attended with an invariable persuasion, that all the divine dispensations are governed by these rules. Hence is derived the best consolation under all the evils to which we are obnoxious, and those various misfortunes to which we are exposed. It is from the mind being subject to the power of external circumstances, that we are so frequently made unhappy through hope, disappointment, and fear.—In general we shall find, that our apprehensions of things, even of divine providence itself, are influenced by the external circumstances of life—when uninterrupted tranquillity gilds every object with delight, and casts over every scene an uniform mildness and serenity; through this medium we can plainly discern the goodness of God.—While our hearts remain untortured by distress, and unwounded by sorrow, we esteem ourselves exempted from the common lot of suffering; and are too apt to attribute our agreeable ease, to the peculiar favour of

heaven, which has kindly interposed in our behalf, averting every storm, preventing every evil, and showering down its inestimable blessings upon our head.—To attribute our happiness to that God from whom alone it can be derived, is the dictate both of reason and religion—but then, are not GOD's *tender mercies over ALL his works*? Is the scheme of divine goodness limited by partiality? or conducted with a reference to but a part of the administration?

When the clouds of calamity bend very low, and darken every prospect of delight; when pressing calamities disturb our usual repose; can we not in these less shining characters, read the evidences of the same perfections which all the works of God display?

It is true, human nature shrinks back from pain—the very oppression of spirits that this will cause, materially affects

the passions.—It lays the mind open to care: and a continued series of evils, lessens our hopes; and the apprehension that they will not be remedied, excites despair.—But if these evils of life are convertible, by virtue of any principle, into the means of the most refined and exalted happiness, ought we not, for our own interest, to enquire after this sovereign remedy; and bless the beneficent hand of heaven, when it gives us a wound, that affords us an opportunity of applying the remedy, that shall produce such salutary effects?—In connection with this design, it will be necessary to attend to the words of our text, *acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace*—which were delivered by Eliphaz to Job, in answer to those reflections and remonstrances, which a man in his situation would naturally make. Calamity had exhausted her quiver upon him; and her arrows stuck deep in his heart, and drank up his soul. He asks for no other privilege, but what is the sad privilege of

forrow, still to complain : though, at the same time, the remembrance of his former happy lot, and in what hasty succession misfortune arrived upon misfortune, *made him afraid*; and upon the recollection, *trembling took hold of his flesh*.—Job found it difficult to reconcile the happiness of the wicked, and the afflictions of the righteous, with the wise and good dispensations of God : which led him to think of his own distresses with peculiar aggravations ; and represent his troubles with dolorous complainings. Eliphaz, willing, upon the same issue, to vindicate divine Providence in his afflicting Job, lays such sins to his charge, as would justify the Almighty in his severity of affliction, even allowing it was a sign of his awful displeasure, or the punishment due to Job's iniquity—and then, to stop his present unavailing complaint, as well as to make him submissive to the hand of God, and to remove the stroke of the Almighty, Eliphaz exhorts Job, more attentively to consider the in-

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tentions of divine Providence in his afflictions, in order to mitigate the severity of his misfortunes, and reduce his mind to tranquillity and peace; and, by this means, obtain from God a release from his present troubles, and a restoration to his former tranquillity and ease. *Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee. Receive, I pray thee, the law from his mouth; and lay up his words in thine heart. If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles. Yea, the Almighty shall be thy defence, then shalt thou have delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God—thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows.*

In this address, Eliphaz offers to Job a lesson, which, to one in his situation, was of the first importance to be learned—which address seems to include a pro-

priety as to the *time* of forming this acquaintance with God—*acquaint* now *thyself with him*.—As if Eliphaz had said—as the time of trouble, in a more especial manner, calls for every aid to support the mind; and as our fortitude and hope, our acquiescence and submission, cannot be established upon a more sure and lasting foundation, than a firm conviction of the equity, and wisdom, and goodness of divine Providence; to form such an acquaintance with the Almighty, as shall lead to a proper contemplation of, and reliance upon the divine goodness, is now, O Job! thy duty, and thine interest—thy troubles are so many—thy distresses so great, and of such a complexion, that without such comforts as an intimacy with the Almighty can afford, my consolation, and the condolment of thy other friends, will afford thee but small relief.

The words of the text obviously lead us to consider,

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I. What is included in the idea of acquaintance with God :

II. To shew its reasonableness and importance ; and

III. To point out its happy consequences.

I. We are to consider, what is included in the idea of acquaintance with God.

The following particulars, seem evidently included.—Such a knowledge of the supreme Being, as results from an attention to the method and rule of his providence—a love and reverence of the divine character—a desire of imitating it—and an absolute reliance upon the divine goodness.—We will briefly consider each.

The parts of nature which are immediately subject to our senses, are those which we can form the most intimate acquaintance with. Others, that lie farther from our inspection, and more remote from our experience, we can only conceive of these, as we are assisted by the visible effects they produce. This is more especially the case in the knowledge and experience we have of the supreme Being. — Though universal nature around us, is constantly affording the most incontestable proofs of the being and perfections of God ; yet his nature remains inscrutable. — We can trace his power—admire his wisdom—we feel his goodness. — But where shall we find the Deity himself? — Pursue we the enquiry with Job. — *Let us go forward—he is not there—backward—we cannot perceive him—on the left hand where he doth work—we cannot behold him—he hideth himself on the right hand, that we cannot see him—he holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth clouds upon it.* —

Though the operation of his hand be necessary for the support of universal nature; yet it is imperceptible by us.— Though his vital energy actuate the whole, yet it is unseen.—But notwithstanding the Deity cannot be perceived; yet what evident demonstrations have we of his Omnipotent power which works undiminished and uncontrouled?—of his wisdom, unchangeable, irreprovable, perfect?—of his goodness, indefectible in its supplies, inexhaustible in its treasure? Hence it is we gain the idea of God's moral government—from these perfections we form the character of that supreme Being, in whose wise administration, equitable disposals, and all-gracious providence, we cannot but rejoice and confide.

This knowledge and confidence lead us naturally to wish for a more perfect knowledge, and more intimate acquaintance with the divine Being; and the goodness

of God encourages us to form this honourable acquaintance with him; and at the same time lays the just foundation for that love and reverence of the Deity, which are essentially necessary in forming the sacred communion we are speaking of.

If our apprehensions of God be gloomy and severe — if we suppose him possessed of infinite power, and an arbitrary, tyrannical will, this will effectually destroy the very foundation of this acquaintance with him. — From such apprehensions as these, we may have our minds frequently employed, or rather tortured and alarmed with fearful expectation of divine wrath: and this is such an acquaintance, which, so far from being attended with peace, it would not suffer us to enjoy the least tranquillity. — But, blessed be God! we have the surest ground and inducements to this acquaintance with God, founded in those immutable perfections of his nature, and gracious declarations of

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his placability and love, which excite in the human breast the greatest complacence, and most exalted joy.

If esteem and love of a character be necessary to our acquaintance with it, what character shall be compared in this, or any other case of preference and regard, with that Being, who, in the most exalted manner, possesses every thing great and venerable, sublime and good!—Our acquaintance with such a Being, is not to be limited by any the least reserve; because those very excellencies of nature which induce us to this intimacy with God, in him are immutable and eternal: so that *whosoever thus trusteth in God, shall never be confounded or ashamed.*

As the acquaintance we have with God, on his side, is infinite condescension and love; so on our side, it ought to be humble, reverend, ardent and sincere.—*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,*

and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength or might.—An acquaintance with God, founded upon these principles, will necessarily lead us to a desire of imitating the excellence of the divine nature; and it does include in itself this desire: for as we are induced to form this intimacy, by those perfections of the divine nature, that raise our reverence and esteem of his character; so, for like reasons, we shall be led to a desire of imitating the Deity. But yet this sacred friendship with God will want much of its perfection, if it be destitute of a firm reliance and trust—such a reliance as arises from the full conviction, and firm belief of the graciously presiding providence of God: which, from the unalterable and essential perfections of the divine Being, must ever be exerted to promote the most wise and benevolent intentions.—We may make this then the very test of that honourable intimacy we have with the Deity; seriously to enquire of ourselves, upon how firm

and unshaken a foundation our hopes rely. — Have we such a supreme regard to the wise dispensations of Providence, that we can say, in all conditions — **THY WILL, O GOD! BE DONE!** Can we, in the most deliberate choice of our souls, resign all our concerns into the hands of God, without a doubt — bear every calamity, without complaint — and rest upon that arm, which sometimes appears severe in correction? — If so, our minds are in some measure formed to the divine resemblance; since this is consenting to the disposals of infinite wisdom.

We have now briefly considered what is included in the idea of acquainting ourselves with God. — We now proceed,

II. To shew its reasonableness, and importance.

And here, we cannot but observe, that the nature of the acquaintance sufficiently

points out its reasonableness. — Is it not reasonable to have our minds employed in contemplating the perfections of God, and the proceedings of his providence? to fix our attention and regard upon a Being, from whom we have derived our very capacities for happiness; and whose favour and approbation will bestow more true honour and dignity than worlds can purchase, or universal nature afford? — Nay! without which, worlds nor universal nature, can furnish out any scenes of happiness or enjoyment.

If the Deity by his own wisdom has ordained it, that no real, permanent felicity shall be found independent of himself; will not reason at once give its favourable report on the side of the most intimate friendship and acquaintance with God? — If the Deity be seated upon a throne of mercy, surrounded with immortal glory—dispensing the blessings of his goodness through the boundless ex-

tent of creation, is it not the dictate of unprejudiced reason, that he is to be loved, revered, and adored?—Angels and celestial intelligences, whose natures are so exalted and refined, are represented as engaged in those services which flow from such dispositions of soul. The reasonableness of a firm reliance, in consequence of our acquaintance with God, is pointed out by those very imperfections of our nature, which we daily experience. Are not our wants numberless, our powers but few?—are there not innumerable events, all of which have a real, though unperceived connection, that will happen in the course of things, which, if not regulated by power, and directed by wisdom superior to our own, must confound our hopes, and destroy all our schemes of felicity? Happy is it for man, that an infinitely wise intelligence presides over human affairs. For were we possessed of omnipotent power, without unerring wisdom, how should we direct

the grand affairs of God's moral administration?—Can we with divine skill touch the minutest spring into action, or wield the mighty whole?—Can we sustain the eternal harmony of things?—To order any part of the divine government aright, it were necessary we should comprehend the whole. But this is the unalienable prerogative of God : and the only way in which we can promote the scheme of divine wisdom, is by such a co-operation with Providence, as an entire submission and acquiescence in the divine will and appointments include.

As to the importance of forming this acquaintance with our Maker ; this will appear as evident, as does the reasonableness of it.

We hold all the enjoyments of this life, by as precarious a tenure as life itself. There is not one species of happiness, but what has its peculiar alloy, and

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depends upon contingent circumstances for its existence. Whatever intimacies we may form, whatever friendships contract, there are certain circumstances, when these will be but of very small avail. Though with respect to our fellow creatures, the exercise of the social affections, with all the endearments of the tenderest friendships, form the most refined happiness of this state; yet there are seasons, in which, though these may afford us some mitigation, they will be found unequal to those consolations which we could wish to enjoy. There are some events which bring us home to ourselves; and a man cannot comfortably commune with his own heart, unless it be right with God. Our consolations when we are retired from this world, must be derived from the next; there is always an account subsisting between God and ourselves, which a friend nor stranger can intermeddle with: it relates solely to God, and our own hearts; and if it stand not fair upon

the records of conscience, this world can afford us but small relief, whenever any apprehensions seize the mind that this account will be demanded of us.

There are circumstances in which such apprehensions will possess the mind ; and when nothing but the consolations of God can be our support. — When the hand of sickness, or trouble has thrown either the dark veil of dejection, or meagre aspect of pain, over our countenances, that once sparkled with joy, and lighted up the flame of friendship in others breasts — when the eye, that magic instrument of the soul, that once bade hearty welcome to all the repasts of companionable enjoyment, is sunk, and robbed of its illustrious spirit, can only lift a languid beam ; then some of our supposed friends will stand aloof : and those whom sincerity and love have bound fast to our fate, by their tender sympathy, will awaken a distress, that will be very far from that consola-

tion we may need. — Pity soothes the soul; but it weakens our fortitude: and the human heart might receive such wounds, that all the consolation of the dearest friend, would at best prove but an opiate that lulls for the present to insensibility, but leaves the cause of the malady unremoved. — But having once formed an acquaintance with God, we have rest under every calamity: we have support as it were in ourselves, while thus we lean upon the rock of eternal ages, while thus we confide in everlasting wisdom, and engage on our side omnipotent power: Then, under every trial, and the last exigence of decaying humanity, we have this for our consolation, *that though flesh and heart fail us, God is the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever.*

We are to consider,

III. What will be the happy consequences of this acquaintance with God — and this the text itself points out to us.

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— *Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at
PEACE.*

As this intimacy with God, as before explained, includes a full persuasion of the wisdom, equity, and goodness of divine providence, and a proper reliance upon the divine mercy in hope of future rewards, the mind of man, fully possessed with such principles as these, needs no other consolation under all the misfortunes of life, nor any other source of happiness, while felicity flows from such an exalted and permanent spring.

This divine communion with God, will naturally lead us to him in all circumstances, either to pay the tribute of gratitude for mercies received, or pray for supports under all our troubles, and a release from our misfortunes. These engagements will lead us to such a sense of the divine goodness, that if at any time the evils of which we complain, are not

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speedily removed, we shall reap our consolation from this thought, that the same infinite wisdom, that first caused, still continues the calamity; and that all our troubles, by being properly borne, and wisely improved, will be the means of our lasting felicity.

This acquaintance with God will also lead us to an holy resentment of the mercies we have received; and a becoming gratitude for every instance of the divine favour. It will be the means of unalloyed satisfaction, when we retire from the world, and happily direct and moderate our passions when we are engaged in it. It will form our souls to a delightful relish of the most refined and exalted friendship; and be the best preparation for the communion with God, and blessed spirits for ever.

As an acquaintance with God, ought to be esteemed the most sublime and last-

ing friendship, no friendships which are not exalted by the same spirit, and refined by the same purity, can lay any just claim to unalloyed tranquillity and peace. — What are the friendships they form, who are associates in the same unlawful pleasures? They find all their pursuits are unable to afford one moment's calm and rational enjoyment : and yet they are ashamed to own their disappointments, lest their companions in vice should scorn their conviction, and accuse them with pusillanimous fear. — They will rather suffer the remonstrances of their own consciences, for falling in with pleasures they disallow, than bear the reproof of others, for acting that part which all must approve. — They pretend to be free, and yet submit their happiness itself to the perverted judgment and direction of those, whose minds are debased, and deceived — they suffer the anarchy of passions in their own breasts ; and, at the expence of their inward peace, are obliged to all

sume an external counterfeit of joy to delude others, while they offer a violence to themselves.—Rather than form such intimacies as these, where men give up all that is rational and noble, generous, free and great, it were surely eligible to tread the path of some solitary desert, and avoid all intercourse with mankind.—But when we have once formed a rational acquaintance with God, and in consequence of this, habituated our minds to contemplations upon the perfections of his nature, we shall have formed our souls to such a love of moral excellence, that we shall contract no friendships but what have moral excellence for their principle. And we shall look upon those we do form, as a delightful union here, which shall fit us for joining the assembly of saints; where we shall enjoy the approbation of God, and uninterrupted social happiness; where we shall be more and more like that infinite, all-perfect Being, whom while we adore, we shall love—whom while we rever-

ence, we shall admire and imitate. — *Thus shall we be changed from glory unto glory—* and by forming an acquaintance with God in this world, we shall be preparing ourselves for a more intimate knowledge of him and his perfections, and the enjoyment of eternal peace, in the world that is to come.

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